

A New Approach
to
The RĀMĀYANA

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वज्रादपि कठोराणि मृदूनि कुसुमादपि ।
लोकोत्तराणां चेतांसि को नु विज्ञातुमर्हति ॥

*Harder than even an adamant and
softer than even a flower are the
hearts of the supereminent. Who is
there that can ever fathom them ?*

BHAVABHŪTI

Transliteration Scheme

आ = ā	Rāma, Tārā.	राम, तारा.
ई = ī	Sitā, Sugrīva.	सीता, सुग्रीव,
ऊ = ū	Ūrmilā, Hanūmān.	ऊर्मिला, हनूमान्.
ऋ = ṛ	Kṛshṇa, Vṛndā.	कृष्ण, वृन्दा.
ए = e	Kekaya, Setu	केकय, सेतु.
ऐ = ai	Kaikeyī, Śrīśaila.	कैकेयी, श्रीशैल.
ओ = o	Droṇāchala, Omkāra.	द्रोणाचल, ओंकार.
औ = au	Gaurī, Gautama.	गौरी, गौतम.
ट = ṭ	Trijaṭā.	त्रिजटा.
ठ = ṭh	Vasishṭha.	वसिष्ठ.
ड = ḍ	Tāḍakā	ताडका.
ढ = ḍh	Dhīmara.	दीमर.
ण = ṇ	Rāvaṇa,	रावण.
श = ś	Śiva, Śabarī.	शिव, शबरी.
ष = sh	Vibhīṣhaṇa, Dūshaṇa.	विभीषण, दूषण.

N. B. The words ऋग्वेद, संस्कृत, and प्राकृत have been written as Rigveda, Sanskrit, and Prakrit according to usage, though they ought to be written as Ṛgveda, Samskr̥ta, Prākṛta.

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Foreward

The author has taken for granted that the reader knows all the events of the Rāmāyaṇa and the order in which they are said to have happened. His aim in these pages is to present those events in their true perspective and deduce therefrom certain inferences of historical value about the life and times of Lord Rāma. Some of his statements are likely to jar on the reader's mind and raise a storm of protest; hence in self-defence as well as to ensure belief he has thought it necessary to quote from Vālmiki and others in the original. The sense of these quotations is sometimes incorporated in the body of the narrative and sometimes given separately. But in either case he has looked more to the spirit than to the letter in rendering them, so that all that is implied in the original may be brought out explicitly in the translation. In a few cases where the points concerned were scattered over a number of verses in the original, he has contracted them into a couple of verses to save space, but retaining the very same words of the original and removing only the many-footed epithets and unnecessary repetitions which have only a musical value, but are otherwise irrelevant to the purpose. In the foot notes *Kālidāsa* stands for his Raghuvamśa, *Bharabhūti* for his Uttararāmacharitanāṭaka, *Māgha* for his Śiśupālavadha, *Bhāravi* for his Kirātārjunīya, *Tilaka* for Swāmi Rāma's commentary on Vālmiki.

Lastly, the author earnestly requests that the reader will bear with him patiently upto the end and then form his judgement one way or the other.

Preface or Rather an Apology

The Rāmāyaṇa has excersised a peculiar fascination over my mind for different reasons at different stages of my life. In boyhood the story books dealing with the exploits of Rāma—shooting down thousands with a single arrow, turning lonely stones to lovely women by the casual touch of his foot, and setting huge rocks afloat on the sea by the magic of his name, appealed to my love of the marvellous; the adventures of Hanūmān—lifting up mountains, pulling down trees, and tossing off demons with his tail which he contracted and extended to any length at will, tickled my sense of the humorous; the pictures of the Rākshasas—with crocodile jaws dripping with human blood, with eyes flashing forth fire, with necks encircled with a lion's mane, with hair bristling up like the quills of a porcupine, filled me with delightful horror. When I was in my teens, it was a part of my duty to read the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa** to my father, the *Rāmacharita-*

* In Sanskrit and attributed to Vyāsa, in which the greatest possible stress has been laid on the divine character of Rāma, and every conflicting incident either explained away or omitted to bring his mortal career into harmony with his assumed incarnation. The narrative is put into the mouth of the god Śiva, who is supposed to be relating the story of Rāma's life to his wife Pārvatī. As the pet doctrines of the Vedānta philosophy are squeezed into the narrative from beginning to end, the tone is essentially spiritual.

*mānasa** to my uncle, and the *Rāma-Vijaya*† to my mother. Being of an imaginative cast of mind and having an ear for melodious verse, Tulasīdāsa held me spell-bound. Tears of joy and sorrow would stream forth from my eyes as I sang out his lines to my equally affected hearers.

But as the edge of my emotions began to wear off in course of time, and as my mind began to take a reflective turn with the growth of years, several doubts started cropping up here, there, and everywhere in the course of my reading the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and these left me altogether bewildered. In fact the entire career of Rāma seemed to me a clueless puzzle. Why, in the first place, said I to myself, did the gods deliberately bring about a catastrophe in Ayodhyā on the eve of Rāma's installation? They had sent him from heaven mainly to kill Rāvaṇa on earth,‡ and he could have fulfilled their wishes even after ascending the throne. Indeed, like his forefather Raghu, he could have set out even as a crowned king for the conquest of the world and, in the course of his victorious march southward, called upon the lord of Lankā to surrender at discretion or

* In Hindi and by Tulasīdāsa. It follows the *Adhyātma* in the main, but lays more stress on devotion as the safest and surest way to self-realisation and eternal bliss.

† In Marathi and by Śrīdhara. Based upon the *Padma Purāṇa*, it gives undue prominence to the legendary aspect of the story.

‡ The *Adhyātma* : I. 2.

भगवन् रावणो नाम बाधते विश्वकण्ठकः ।

अतस्त्वं मानुषो भूत्वा जहि देवरिपुं प्रभो ॥

fight to the bitter end. This would have been quite in accordance with the time-honoured ways of the kshatriyas. Why, then, did the gods adopt the tortuous course of first corrupting the mind of Kaikeyī,* then sending Daśaratha to tragic death, thus causing disruption in the royal family, and spreading a mournful gloom throughout the kingdom ? Can this be called the godly way, namely, to plan the destruction of a single sinner on the unmerited sufferings of several innocents !—Daśaratha dying in tearful agony, Bharata living in protracted turmoil, Rāma wandering without a home, Kausalyā withering in helpless widowhood, Kaikeyī branded with indelible disgrace, and Sītā doomed to endless trials ! Even the malignant spirits of hell might shrink from causing so much distress, which the benevolent angels of heaven engineered with meticulous care and marvellous exultation !

Secondly, how did Daśaratha happen to forget Kaikeyī's son and Sītāji's father on the eve of Rāma's installation ? Shortness of time can never be accepted as an explanation, because he is said to have arranged in time to invite kings and chieftains from

* The *Adhyātma* : II. 2.

रामाभिषेकविघ्नार्थं देवा वाणीमचोदयन् ।
मन्थरां प्रविशस्वादौ कैकेयीं च ततः परम् ।
ततो विघ्ने समुत्पन्ने पुनरेहि दिवं शुभे ॥

afar to grace this auspicious occasion.* And why Rāma too did not choose to point out this glaring error of omission to his father, though he loved Bharata most and revered Janaka best ? Moreover, though it was the son of Kausalyā who was to be elevated to the throne, yet Daśaratha did not care to tell her personally this happy news, or pass the previous night in her joyous company : he went instead to the palace of Kaikeyī whose son he had utterly neglected ! My head reeled over this strange behaviour.

Thirdly, if Sitā is to be extolled as a model of wifely devotion for saying that her place was always by the side of her husband, be he a king in the palace or a hermit in the jungle, what shall we say to Ūrmilā who stayed behind Lakshmaṇa ? Why are the poets so silent on this point ? Why did she not, like Sitā, insist that she also would share the weal and woe of her husband, be he a slave of Rāma in exile or his second-in-command in sovereignty ? If Lakshmaṇa's main object in accompanying Rāma was only to serve him,† who could have served Sitā better than Ūrmilā herself ? On this ground alone

* *Vālmiki* : II. 1.

नानागरवास्तव्यान् पृथग्जानपदानपि ।
समानिनाय मेदिन्यां प्रधानान् पृथिवीपतिः ।
ततः प्रविचिष्टुः शेषा राजानो लोकसंमताः ॥

The *Tilaka* : शेषाः केकयजनकव्यतिरिक्ता इत्यर्थः ॥

† The *Adhyātma* : II. 4.

यास्यामि पृष्ठतो राम सेवां कर्तुं तदादिश ॥

she could have compelled Lakshmana to take her with him. Or she might have used the same threat of suicide which Sītā* and Lakshmana† both ultimately held forth before Rāma in order to leave him no other choice but to let them come along with him, though much against his will.

Fourthly, why did Rāma hide from Śūrpanakhā the fact that Lakshmana also like him was a married man ?‡ Why did he not tell her straight away that neither of them, being strict monogamists, could ever accept her hand ? Why did he tantalise her with false hopes and make sport of her and exasperate her into a criminal mood ?§ She was after all the sister of Rāvaṇa, a great monarch, and does not

* The *Adhyātma* : II. 4.

यदि गच्छसि मां त्यक्त्या प्राणांस्त्यक्ष्यामि तेऽग्रतः ।

इति तं निश्चयं ज्ञात्वा सीताया रघुनन्दनः ।

अब्रवीद् देवि गच्छ त्वं वनं शीघ्रं मया सह ॥

† The *Adhyātma* : II. 4.

अनुगृह्णीष्व मां राम नोचेत्प्राणांस्त्यजाम्यहम् ।

तथेति राघवोऽप्याह लक्ष्मणं याहि मा चिरम् ॥

‡ *Vālmiki* : III. 18.

अपूर्वी भार्यया चार्थी लक्ष्मणो नाम वीर्यवान् ।

अनुरूपश्च भर्ता ते रूपस्यास्य भविष्यति ॥

i. e. Lakshmana is still a bachelor and in need of a wife. As he is matchless in valour, he is a good match for you who are matchless in beauty.

§ *Kālidāsa* : XII.

फलमस्योपहासस्य सद्यः प्राप्स्यसि पश्य माम् ।

रूपं शूर्पणखा नाम्नः सदृशं प्रत्यपद्यत ॥

the barbarous mutilation of her face extenuate to some extent his guilt of abducting Sitā in revenge ?

Fifthly, why did Rāma kill Vāli surreptitiously, when, as the Supreme Being and Champion of righteousness, he should have punished him openly and honourably, without a blot on his own fair name ? If Vāli deserved no mercy for his immoral conduct, in what way could Sugrīva be said to be superior to him in morality ?—*he* who, while his own heroic elder brother was at close grips with his enemy elsewhere, had usurped the throne of Kishkindhā*

* The *Adhyātma* : IV.

ततोऽब्रुवं मृतो वाली गुहायां रक्षसा हतः ।

तच्छ्रुत्वा दुःखितैः सर्वैरनिच्छन्नभिषेचितः ॥

i. e. "Then I told (the ministers) that Vāli was dead, slain by his enemy in the subterranean cave. Saddened at heart on hearing this, they all installed me on the throne against my will."

It is worth remembering that it is Sugrīva who is here presenting his case to Rāma in as favourable a light as possible. Even assuming that he sincerely believed in Vāli's death, it is not at all clear why he should have overridden the claims of Aṅgada to the throne; for being Vāli's son, he was the legitimate heir. Nor can it be argued that Aṅgada was an idiot or a mere child at that time; for not long after he was given the ambassador's job to plead the cause of Rāma before Ravana, and on his return he figured conspicuously as a general in the invasion of Laṅkā. Aṅgada's own words in this connection are different :—

Vālmiki : IV. 55. कथं स धर्मं जानीते येन भ्रात्रा दुरात्मना ।

युद्धायाभिनीयुक्तेन बिलस्य पिहितं सुखम् ॥

i. e. 'Does Sugrīva ever know what virtue is ? He is so wicked that with fratricidal intentions he closed up the mouth of the cave which Vāli, engaged in the pursuit of his enemy, had ordered him to guard.

and dragged his helpless wife upon his incestuous bed,*—he who, after assisting in the assassination of his liege lord, had forced his mournful widow into concubinage !†

Sixthly, does Vibhishana really deserve the praise that has been so lavishly showered upon him by all poets ? Does not his loyalty to Rāma mean at bottom his treachery to Rāvaṇa whose salt he ate ? If he did not approve of his brother's policy, all that he could honourably do was to hold himself aloof from him, to non-cooperate with him in the war that followed. But to go over to Rāma with these words, "My kingship, my life, my happiness rest entirely in your hands,"‡ and to turn an

* Bhāsa's *Abhiṣekanātaka* : I.

सुग्रीवेणाभिमुष्टाऽभूद्धर्मपत्नी गुरोर्मम ।

तस्य दाराभिमर्षित्वात् कथं दण्ड्योऽस्मि राघव ॥

Vāli says, "By Sugrīva was outraged the lawful wife of me who was like a father to him. How, then, I alone become punishable in your eyes for the seizure of his wife, when he has been guilty of a much worse incest !"

† *Vālmiki* : IV. 31. ततः सुग्रीवभवनं प्रविश्य हरिपुंगवाः ।

क्रोधमागमनं चैव लक्ष्मणस्य न्यवेदयन् ।

तारया सहितः कामी सक्तः कपिवृषस्तदा ।

न तेषां कपिसिंहानां शुश्राव वचनं तदा ॥

"Then the monkey chiefs entered the palace of Sugrīva to inform him of the arrival of Lakshmaṇa in anger. But the voluptuous king, sunk in carnal enjoyment with Tārā, the widow of Vāli, heeded not their words."

‡ *Vālmiki* : VI. 19.

अब्रवीच्च तदा वाक्यं रामं प्रति विभीषणः ।

भवद्गतं हि मे राज्यं जीवितं च सुखानि च ॥

informer against his liege lord, with an offer of fullest help in his destruction,* indicates clearly that in changing sides, his basic motive was not pure love of truth and justice, but sheer lust of life and power. Should we therefore call him a magnanimous soul or a despicable turn-coat ?

Lastly, how is it that Rāma ordered a fire-ordeal for Sītā only in Laṅkā but not in Ayodhyā ? Did the so-called barbarians and cannibals of the south deserve to have their suspicions set at rest, but not the civilised vegetarians of the north ? If the god of fire presented Sītā to Rāma unscathed in the island, could he not do the same on the mainland ? If his own enlightened subjects refused to accept the report of the miracle at Laṅkā on blind faith, and if they demanded a direct proof of Sītā's chastity before their very eyes, why did his mouth dry up†

4 *Vālmiki* : VI. 19.

तस्य तद्वचनं श्रुत्वा रामो वचनमब्रवीत् ।
आख्याहि मम तत्त्वेन रावणस्य बलाबलम् ।
एवमुक्तस्तदा सर्वमाख्यातुमुपचक्रमे ॥

So also the *Adhyātma* : VI. 3.

रावणस्य विनाशे त्वं साहाय्यं कर्तुमर्हसि ।

1 *Vālmiki* : VII. 45.

उवाच वाक्यं काकुत्स्थो मुखेन परिश्रुष्यता ।
पौरापवादः सुमहांस्तथा जनपदस्य च ।
वर्तते मयि बीभत्सा सा मे मर्माणि कृन्तति ।
न हि पश्याम्यहं भूतं किंचिद् दुःखमतोऽधिकम् ॥

i. e. With his mouth drying up, the descendant of Kakutstha said, 'what a scandal has risen against me in town and village ! That the people should have so loathsome a feeling towards me, cuts me to the quick.'

and his heart shudder at the idea of repeating the experiment? Though convinced at heart of her stainless character,* he yielded to the malicious clamour of his people† and, acting against his own conscience, mournfully cast her away into the forest and ate his own heart out for the rest of his life.‡ Why should he consign her innocent soul to the horrors of disgrace as an unchaste woman and his own noble self to the torments of remorse as an inhuman wretch!§

These questions kept revolving in my mind for days together and made me restless. Finding no answer in the sacred books I was reading, I referred them to my elders and other venerable people of the orthodox school. But they all closed their ears first and then stopped my mouth by saying that it was blasphemy even to raise such questions. Thereupon I turned to Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti, Bhaṭṭi, Kumāradāsa and other classical poets, but here too I was sorely disappointed. For beyond splashes of the marvellous, extravagant conceits, verbal gymnastics, figurative acrobatics, and mawkish sentimentality they had

* *Vālmiki* : VII. 45.

अन्तरात्मा च मे वेत्ति सीतां शुद्धां यशस्विनीम् ॥

† *Bhavabhūti* : I.

हा कथमिदानीं देव्यै दुर्जनवचनादनार्यमभ्यवसितं देवेन ॥

‡ *Bhavabhūti* : III.

हा हा देवि स्फुटति हृदयं संसते देहबन्धः ।

विष्वङ्मोहः स्थगयति कथं मन्दभाग्यः करोमि ॥

§ *Bhavabhūti* : I.

उन्मुच्य प्रियगृहिणीं गृहस्य शोभां

क्रव्याद्भ्यो बलिमिव निर्घृणः क्षिपामि ॥

little to offer. I then looked to modern scholars of the East and West, but these instead of clarifying my doubts made the confusion in my mind still worse confounded. For, some exploded the whole Rāmāyaṇa as a mere fable or an allegory;* some discovered in it the influence of Homer's Iliad;†

* Lassen held that the story was intended to represent allegorically the first attempt of the Aryans to spread their culture and civilisation to the South and Ceylon. This view has been rejected by other scholars, but on grounds rather discreditable to Rāma and Vālmiki alike. For they say that the Indian hero is nowhere represented as having exercised a healthy influence on the life and thought of the natives of the South, and secondly that the Indian poet could hardly possess Bunyan's genius to transform systematically a series of abstract ideas into a narrative of visual images.

—*Macdonell's Sanskrit Literature* : Chap. X.

† Weber held that Vālmiki's Ādikāvya is an adaptation of the Greek Epic. Really speaking, the forcible abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa and the siege of Laṅkā by Rāma bears only a factitious resemblance to the willing elopement of Helen with Paris and the siege of Troy by the entire warrior host of Greece. In one respect the difference is very striking : while the Hindu heroine, in spite of her purity being testified by the gods, was even then abandoned in the jungle by Rāma on mere suspicion, the Spartan heroine, in spite of her glaring faithlessness, was graciously received back into his arms by Menelaus, whom she had even attempted to poison on sick-bed ! Moreover it is only the jaundiced eye which can see any similarity between Rāma breaking a bow to win the hand of maidenly Sītā, and Ulysses bending a bow to shoot the importunate suitors of his fairly old Penelope. Indeed, stories of such feats of strength are so common in the ancient literatures of the world that originality of conception need not be claimed for the West only, as Weber often did.

some averred that it was a fanciful enlargement of the Daśaratha Jātaka;* some opined that it was only a transformation of a celestial myth into a narrative of earthly adventures.† Some who were

* This again is Weber's theory. To examine it briefly, in the first place while the Epic deals mainly with the adventurous career of Rāma in the wilderness of the south, the Jātaka brings Rāma back home after a twelve years' sojourn in the northern Himalayas without a single achievement to his credit. Secondly, while the Epic practically begins with the marriage of Rāma and Sītā as persons of two entirely different families, the Jātaka ends with the wedding of Rāma and Sītā as brother and sister born of the same parents! This representation of Sītā as the sister of Rāma was purposely introduced in the Jātaka to create a parallel instance to the story of Buddha's ancestors having been born of a brother and a sister married to each other. Whatever the Buddhists may feel about it, such matrimonial connexions are entirely repugnant to Hindu sentiment. Apart from this, there is nothing in the whole Jātaka that can be said to be inspiring; rather much of it is sickening, and the rest a mere rigmarole. That the Jātaka itself is a hopelessly bad abridgement of Vālmiki's original Epic has now been proved on linguistic and other considerations.

† This is Jacobi's theory and is fully supported by Macdonell. According to these scholars, the Epic presents a curious combination of two Vedic myths. One myth tells us that when the cows of heaven were stolen away by Vṛtrasura, otherwise called *Indraśatru*, their hiding place was discovered by the divine bitch *Saramā* and their recovery was effected by Indra with the assistance of *Maruts* or wind-gods. This, they say, corresponds to the abduction of Sītā by the well-known father of *Indrajit*, her consolation by Vibhishana's wife *Saramā*, and her rescue by Rāma with the help of *Māruti*, the son of Wind-god. Sītā's appearance from and disappearance into the earth, her pining for reunion with Rāma after her abandonment

(Continued on next page)

inclined to treat it as a piece of history, 'dressed in fiction,' advanced the most astounding view that the Rāma-Rāvana-tussel was in fact a struggle of Brahmanism versus Buddhism.* Some pretended to take a balanced view, but being obsessed by Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, narrowed down the heroism of Rāma to the feat of abolishing cannibalism from south India !†

(Continued from previous page)

are taken by these scholars to resemble another myth relating to Sita as the Deity of the ploughed field, looking forward to the arrival of Parjanya, the Rain God, in drought.

Macdonell's Sanskrit Literature : Chap. X.

* This is Talboys Wheeler's theory in his *History of India*, Vol. II. He says that since the Buddhists were bitterly opposed to the Brahmanical sacrifices and were driven out of the Dekkan by the worshippers of Śiva Linga who compelled them to take refuge in Ceylon, and since Rāma is said to have worshipped the Śiva Linga on the sea-shore and to have protected the sacrifices of Brahman sages from the violent attacks of the Rākshasas whom he finally expelled from the South to the island of Laṅkā—these circumstances point to the identity of the Rākshasas with the Buddhists who flourished in India for a period of twelve centuries from 500 B. C. to 700 A. D. and established a seat of empire in Ceylon, which has continued to this day. The theory is too fantastic to deserve serious consideration. It will suffice to mention here that Rāma and Daśaratha are mentioned even in the Ṛg-Veda, and that Vālmiki's original Epic has been accepted by all Sanskritists to have been composed long before the birth of Gautama Buddha.

† This is C. V. Vaidya's view in his *Riddle of the Rāmāyana*. He says that like Cortez, the Spanish adventurer, Rāma was a hero who, under the wise dispensation of the Almighty, was brought into conflict with the man-eaters of the Dekkan,

(Continued on next page)

Dissatisfied everywhere, I threw myself at the feet of Rāma himself and cried for light, and then the thought flashed across my mind that I was unnecessarily running after rills and brooks, when the fountainhead in the form of the Ādikāvya lay so close by. I plunged into it, and there amidst weeds of absurd, tasteless, entangling interpolations I discovered the genuine words of Vālmiki. And as I pieced them together and reflected over them, Lord Rāma revealed himself to me as the greatest political and military genius that India has produced—he who, working under the frightfully hopeless circumstances, raised the Aryan race from the lowest depths of subjection to the heights of glorious independence! Another fact which struck me as peculiarly significant was that after the era of Rāvaṇa, the Purāṇas spoke no more of *Deva-Asura-sangrāma* or *Deva-Rākshasa-Yuddha*. The next *Avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa dealt only with the internecine strife among the Aryans themselves. Thus the war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa stood out before me as the final phase of the long-drawn-out struggle for supremacy between the Aryan settlers of India and the Non-Aryan

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as fierce, detestable, and implacable as the Aztecs of Mexico, and who, by exterminating them, purified this land of ours from the debasing practice of cannibalism, as Cortez did the land of Mexicans! The only answer to this view is our expression of pity that whereas in India there is not a single village but has a shrine of Rāma in it, in Mexico there should not be a single temple dedicated to the worship of Cortez for his humanitarian purge. May be that the inhabitants of Mexico are ungrateful folks, or the natives of India are idolatrous fools!

owners of this land, the former being spoken of as the *Devas* by Aryan sages and the latter nicknamed by them as the *Asuras* or the *Rākshasas*; just as Churchill dubs his own people the angelic saviours of mankind and daubs his enemy the ferocious beasts of prey.

The present book, thus, is an attempt to interpret the life of Rāma in this light. It is too much to expect that my readers will see eye to eye with me throughout, though I have taken care to support every unorthodox view of mine by quotations from orthodox works and by reasonings based upon them. However, my chief aim is to force upon the attention of my countrymen that the so-called mythical world of Rāma, though seemingly controlled by infallible curses and boons, was in no way different from our own world which is obviously dominated by inexorable moral and material laws, and to bring home to their mind that the causes governing the rise and fall of nations are in every age and in every epoch of history exactly the same. Whatever success I achieve in this respect is the measure of my reward. To bear out my point of view I have discussed in detail what led to the downfall of the Aryans before Rāma and what led to the rise of the Non-Aryans under Rāvaṇa; and also how similar causes working in the opposite directions brought about their rise and fall respectively under Rāma and after Rāvaṇa.

The Rāmāyana has been the solace of my life all these years. It has impressed upon my mind this truth that no great nation can ever be felled by

another from outside, unless it is morally fallen from within. Indeed, no big tree shall ever be blown down by a storm, unless it is first rotten in the roots. The decline and fall of India after Harshavardhana of Kanauj had always puzzled me. Neither the bombasts of historians, nor the phillipics of the congressites, nor the railleries of the reformers, nor the whimperings of the sanatanists helped me in the least to solve the riddle. It is Vālmiki alone who furnished the key to the problem as to why the sun of India set permanently after 650 A. D. In the long night that followed a few meteors did blaze across the sky, such as Rāpā Pratāp who stood up against the might of Akbar and preferred to live in hard liberty rather than luxuriate under an easy yoke; Rājā Śivāji who founded the Mahratta kingdom under the very nose of Bijapur and in spite of the long arms of Delhi; Rānī Laxmībāi who struggled manfully against the tightening grip of the White Octopus. But these meteors blazed to no lasting purpose : they could not set afire the icy cold heart of the rest of India. Indeed, mutual animosities,* sordid selfishness, brazen-faced hypocrisy, lip service

* General Mansfield, Chief of Staff of the Indian Army, wrote after the Mutiny :— “ It was not because the Sikhs loved us but because they hated Hindustān and the Hindustāni regiments that they flocked to our standard, instead of seizing the golden opportunity they had to strike again for their freedom. They were eager for revenge and for the loot of the cities of Hindustān. They were not attracted by mere daily pay but by the prospect of wholesale plunder and slaughter of their native enemies. In short, we turned to account the *esprit de*

(Continued on next page)

to truth but silent homage to falsehood, all attention to lifeless idols and utter disregard of suffering humanity, professing the oneness of all Hindus but clinging like a leech to thousands of incisions within the same caste*—these and other diseases have in us penetrated to the very bone and left us so weak that outsiders have for centuries feasted merrily upon our rotting body. Mahmud of Ghazni might come here any number of times and overrun the sacred Āryāvarta unchecked—sacking towns, plundering cities, desecrating temples, and carry away enormous piles of wealth ! Here Baber might come and plant the flag of Islamic power in this soil, which continues to stream threateningly above

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corps of the old Khalsa Army of Ranjit Singh in suppressing the Mutiny of 1857."

When the news of the enlistment of the Gurkhas reached Lord Dalhousie in England, he wrote to a friend : " Against the Oudh sepoys they may be confidently expected to fight like devils." And they did.

The Martial Races of India, a series of articles by Mr. Choudhari in the *Modern Review* of 1930-31.

* 'There is among the Hindus no passion for unity, no desire for fusion. There is no desire to have a common dress, no desire to have a common language, no will to give up what is local and particular for something which is common and national. A Gujarathi takes pride in being a Gujarathi, a Maharashtrian in being a Maharashtrian, a Punjabi in being a Punjabi, a Madrasi in being a Madrasi, and a Bengali prides in being a Bengali ! Such is the mentality of the Hindus ! And yet they have the cheek to accuse the Mussalman of want of national feeling when he says that he is a Mussalman first and Indian afterwards.'

Dr. Ambedkar : *Thoughts on Pākistān*.

us to this very day and compels us to yield on every point to the few well-knit Moslems. Here the Portuguese might come, the Dutch might come, the French might come, the English might come; and they might set up factories, build forts, keep armies, and enlist our own people to enslave this land of Rāma,—of Rāma whom we hallelujah in the temples, but whose name even we are not worthy to utter, much less to call ourselves his devout followers !*

Rāma was not a blind follower of religious dogmas and social conventions. He practised what Lord Kṛṣṇa preached long after him to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra† :—

‘One who walks in the light of pure reason, neither deflected by passion nor biased by sentiment, remains unaffected by good and bad acts. Strive, therefore, O Arjuna ! to attain equilibrium; for one who is balanced in mind knows the right way of doing the right thing at the right moment.’

He sought to achieve his objects by fair means as far as possible, but if the use of hook or crook

* *Bhāravi* : II.

अनुपालयतामुद्देश्यतीं प्रभुशक्तिं द्विषतामनीहया ।

अपयान्त्यचिरान्महीभुजां जननिर्वादमयादिव श्रियः ॥

i. e. Those who see their enemies growing stronger every day before their very eyes and yet remain supine, are forthwith forsaken by Royal Fortune which disdains to stay with such imbecile fools !

† *The Gīta* : II. बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।

तस्माद् योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥

became unavoidable, he did not shrink from it : Witness how he stabbed Vāli in the back in order to strike Rāvaṇa effectively in the heart. He covered much of his ground by sweet persuasion, but he never adopted non-violence as his creed; for he knew full well that in this world, where sinners are rife and saints but rare,* to connive at wanton cruelty, to tolerate gratuitous insult, to submit to intimidation was to degrade forgiveness to the level of pusillanimity and to put a premium on these noxious qualities.† On such occasions he did not go on hunger strike; he clenched his fist tightly and hit squarely between the eyes : Witness how he wiped out the entire lot of Tāḍakā and her brood, and stopped once for all further encroachment of the Rākshasas upon the Aryan settlements to the south of the Ganges ! He guarded against rift or treachery among his own followers, but engineered it skilfully in the enemy's camp to sap his strength : Witness how he pandered to the cupidity of Vibhīṣhaṇa and made him delve under the feet of his own brother !

* The *Manusmṛiti* : VII.

सर्वो दण्डजितो लोको दुर्लभो हि शुचिर्नरः ।
दण्डस्य हि भयात्सर्वे जगद्भोगाय कल्पते ॥

i. e. It is the fear of punishment which ensures orderly life in society and makes it possible for all to enjoy peace and happiness; for, persons righteous at heart are extremely difficult to find in this world.

† The *Mahābhārata* :

एकः क्षमावतां दोषो द्वितीयो नोपपद्यते ।
यदेनं क्षमया युक्तमशक्तं मन्यते जनः ॥

Though conscious of his high birth and truly religious at heart, he was not squeamish or hide-bound : Witness how he appreciated the guileless love of Śabarī and ate her nibbled fruits with a relish; thereby he gained her precious help in the execution of his wonderful design* and the whole-hearted co-operation of the hill tribes of the south ! He included the *Vānaras* and the *Rākshasas* among his own people and thereby spread Eternal Religion to the farthest extremity of India. But we of to-day, though of the same caste, creed, culture, custom, and language must abominate each other's food for the glory of Sanātana Dharma, and demonstrate the superiority of our respective grades within the same circle by despising even each other's glance as a pollution of each other's cooking.†

Not to allow a single loophole in his plans, not to leave anything to the mercy of chance, not to make a start without adequate preparations, and not to waver but to go ahead when once the decisive step was taken, this was his fourfold policy : Witness his slow, steady, and silent toiling in Dandakāranya for thirteen years, his anticipation of the enemy's moves with unerring foresight, his timely substitution of a false Sītā in place of the real one, and his

* See Chapter V.

† ' This has been my chief complaint against Hinduism that while a Muslim wants all to share his dish with him, a Hindu retires into the privacy of his kitchen and permits not even the shadow of his own caste-brother to fall on his food. I once asked Mr. Gandhi to justify this feature of his faith to me.'

M. Mahomed Ali's *Congress Presidential Address*,

conquest of the vast empire of Rāvaṇa within six months ! If he made promises, he made it a point of honour to keep them and did not, like Napoleon, put his own brothers in places he had promised to others for loyal help; or like Warren Hastings, bleed the puppets white by constant extortions; or like Robert Clive, present his accomplices with a fictitious red paper in place of the stipulated bargain : Witness how he left Vibhīṣhaṇa in full possession of the enormous wealth of Laṅkā ! In praise of this generosity of Rāma's, I heard a verse in Benaras when I was a student there at Queen's College. It struck me as fine and has since then stuck in my memory to this day. Its purport is as follows :—

“When the son of Sumitrā proposed that the kingdom of Laṅkā might be handed over to Vibhīṣhaṇa according to promise, but its treasury be claimed as spoils of war, the Scion of the Raghu race smiled, and said that when the elephant had been freely given away as a gift, was there any sense in wrangling over the retention of a mere goad ? ”*

Indeed, Rāma had not the meanness to exploit the conquered territory in the name of co-prosperity, or to humiliate the fallen foe with a halter in the

* *Anonymous* :—

सौमित्रिर्वदति विभीषणाय लंकां
 देहि त्वं भुवनपते ! विनैव कोषम् ।
 तच्छ्रुत्वा रघुःतिराह वाक्यमेतत्
 संत्यक्ते करिणि किमंकुशे विवादः ॥

name of justice to humanity* : Witness his tribute of praise to the spirit of Rāvaṇa who never gave in but fought to the death, and the stately funeral he ordered in honour of his body that lay still on the stricken field !†

Whether Rāma was or was not an incarnation of God is an idle question. What really matters to us is that he was born a man and as such, being himself imperfect and working in an imperfect world, he had to fulfill himself in a variety of ways, some of which can hardly be called above reproach, though undeniably indispensable to success. It is worth remembering that when the gods once came to him from heaven to remind him that he was the

* (a) Twelve out of twenty-one Germany's men of light and leading were sentenced to death by hanging on October 1, 1946. If what Churchill said about Stalin's cold-blooded massacre of thousands of his own countrymen, about his aggression upon Finland, Baltic States and Rumania was true, then Russia's sitting in judgement over Germany marked the climax of mock justice. Indeed, this trial of Germany by the Tribunal of Victors reminds one of the famous trial of a helpless sheep, in *Aesop's Fables*, by the tribunal of a fox, a monkey, and a wolf.

(b) Mussolini, the vanquished hero of Italy, was riddled with bullets, trampled under foot, and suspended from a tree to be spit upon by the riff-raff. Joan of Arc was burnt alive, and Tatia Topey, the hero of 1857, met a dog's death at the hands of his victors.

† *Vālmiki* : VI. 109.

नायं विनष्टो निश्चेष्टः समरे चण्डविक्रमः ।

अत्युन्नतमहोत्साहः पतितोऽयमशक्तिः ।

परैर्वा हन्यन्ते वीरः परान्वा हन्ति संयुगे ।

क्रियतामस्य संस्कारो ममाप्येष यथा तव ॥

Supreme Being, he silenced them with a curt reply.* "Look here, ye celestial hosts," he said, "all that I care to know at present is that I am a man, a son of Daśaratha, and as such I shall behave. Do not pester me again with such reminders." Thus before a man of action in this world there lies a choice of two alternatives only—either to vacillate between right and wrong, and die like Hamlet a tragic failure,† or to dash forward resolutely with a singleness of aim and live like Rāma a glorious success.‡

What was intended to be merely a Preface has ultimately turned out to be an Apology for my standpoint in this book. It has already run to a tedious length; hence it is time to close it and let the Prologue begin.

Nagpur, 7-7-1947.

N. R. Navlekar

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 117.

अब्रवीत् त्रिदशश्रेष्ठान् रामो धर्मभृतां वरः ।

आत्मानं मानुषं मन्ये रामं दशरथात्मजम् ॥

† *Hamlet* : III.

Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied ov'r with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

‡ The *Gītā* : IV. व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिरेकेह कुरुनन्दन ।

बहुशाखा ह्यनन्ताश्च बुद्धयोऽव्यवसायिनाम् ।

नायं लोकोऽस्ति न परो न सुखं संशयात्मनः ॥

i. e. Whereas the resolute mind has all its force concentrated on one point, diffused are the energies of the irresolute. Indeed, for the doubting self there is neither this world nor the next, no happiness on this side of the grave or beyond it.

DEDICATED

TO

Mahamahopadhyaya

V. V. MIRASHI, M. A.

AS A TOKEN OF
AFFECTION AND REGARD

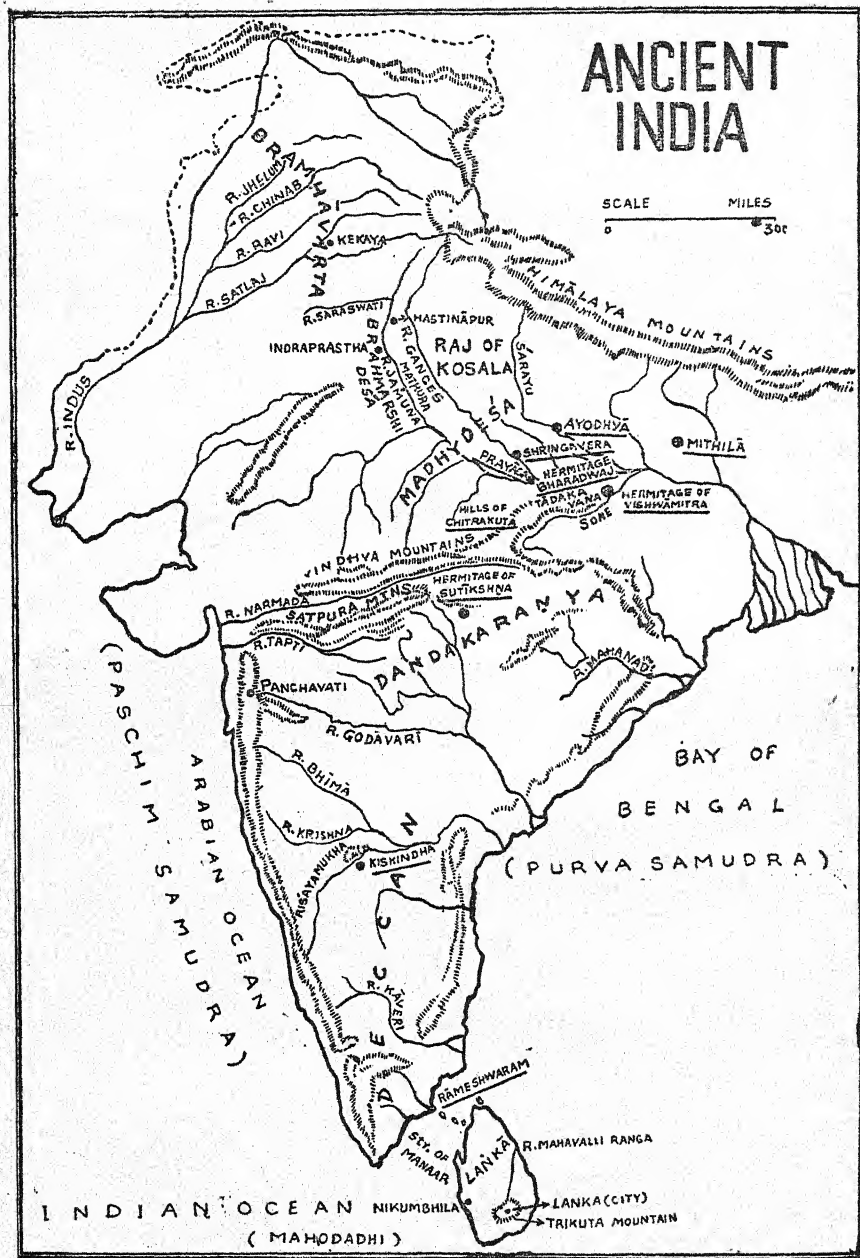


ERRATA

Page	Line from		For	read
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14 (note)		9	स दुराचारे	सुदुराचारे
17	8		Gautam	Gautama
31		12	Catholism	Catholicism
62		1	Sankrit	Sanskrit
149		4	You ask ...	"You ask ..
169		12	accidently	accidentally
175		3	succeeds	succeed
186	3		*	†
231	9		accidently	accidentally
247 (note)		1	कछ	कडु
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ANCIENT INDIA

SCALE 0 300 MILES



A New Approach to the Ramayana



CHAPTER I

The Prologue

From ancient times to the present day the glory of Rāma has been sung by many, and they are all poets of no mean order. Their books are widely read in India, not so much for the enjoyment of aesthetic pleasure, as with a view to the enhancement of spiritual merit. The *Ādikāvya* of Vālmiki, the *Adhyātma* of Vyāsa, the *Rāma-charita-mānasa* of Tulasidāsa, the *Rāma-vijaya* of Śrīdhara, and the like are believed to be divinely inspired and to radiate blissful influence through their words; hence they are daily recited in families and in assemblies with intense devotional fervour. Thus the story of Rāma is already too familiar to young and old alike to need elaboration or elucidation. I am well aware of it, and my only apology for choosing so commonplace a theme is that since the conventional manner in which it has

been treated so far by pious authors, fails to carry conviction to the sceptical mind of today, and since the uncharitable way in which it has been dissected by critical scholars,* shocks the susceptibilities of a devout heart, one may without irreverence deal with it from a rationalistic standpoint and study the doings of Rāma, not as the Supreme Being, but as a human hero, divested of all the supernatural powers which his votaries have ascribed to him.

Without meaning any slur on the theory of Divine Incarnation, I should like to point out that those who have accepted it as the basis of their treatment of the subject, have unfortunately lost sight of the simple fact that if God chose to be born a man, He must also have meant to accomplish His purpose by such means as are available to man and

* Since Sita, in spite of her constant association with Rāma for twenty-five years, bore no children to him until after their triumphant return to Ayodhya, *Weber* is inclined to give credence to the Buddhistic legend, as recorded in the Daśaratha Jātaka, that she was the sister of Rāma, whom she married after the period of exile was over: possibly because, we may add, she could find none else willing to take her to wife on account of her pollution by the touch of the Demon's hand!

† Since Rāma abandoned Sita most heartlessly at a time when her delivery was drawing near, *Talboys Wheeler* thinks that she must have conceived of Rāvana; for, when the fact of her pregnancy, which Rāma could not conscientiously trace to himself, was discovered by him, he, who had become as jealous and peevish as Henry the Eighth, cast her away into the jungle; and later on, we may add, when the proof of her guilt appeared before the eyes of the world in the form of twin-sons, he buried her alive into a bottomless pit.

in such ways as are within his reach; otherwise there would be no point in God's taking human birth at all. He could as well have lightened the burden of the world by the merest of a wish, right from His abode in the seventh heaven, and there was really no necessity for Him to descend from there in person to this Earth! Having ignored this self-evident truth, our poets have described the achievements of Rāma with so extravagant a fancy and with such idolatry, that the impression is irresistible that all those achievements were but miracles, which God alone could perform and which we, poor mortals, can never hope to comprehend, much less to imitate. Secondly, most of them, and especially Tulasidāsa, have laid so much stress on the domestic virtues of Rāma—his filial piety, his conjugal fidelity, his fraternal affection, and his affable disposition, that these alone occupy the forefront of our attention; whereas his main qualities as the saviour of the Aryan race in India sink into the background. The result is that Rāma is chiefly remembered by the many as a model of cordial family relations, rather than as a man of light and leading who combined subtle political wisdom with a superb spirit of adventure.

It is this aspect of the life of Rāma which is of all-absorbing interest. But the pity is that much of its educative value is lost to us, because while it needed a material consideration, it has received instead a mystical representation. There prevails, therefore, a curious feeling in society—and our poets are responsible for it—that the entire course of events as depicted in the Rāmāyana was previously

ordained.* Thus, for instance, Rāvaṇa was already doomed to death at the hands of man and monkey, and God simply fulfilled that doom in his sportive manner;† Kaikeyī was already condemned to eternal

* Some even go to the length of saying that Vālmiki wrote the Rāmāyaṇa long before the birth of Rāma, and that Rāma and others consulted this book before they took any step in life. This makes the persons of the Rāmāyaṇa as mere puppets, dancing on the world stage according as Vālmiki pulled his wires from behind. Thus in the *Adhyātma* Sītā says that she would accompany Rāma to the forest, because nowhere in the Rāmāyaṇa has she read that Sītā stayed behind. To put such an argument into the mouth of Sītā is to reduce her to the level of a mechanized doll, which has no will or judgement of its own and therefore deserves no praise : cf. The *Adhyātma* : II. 4.

रामायणानि बहुशः श्रुतानि बहुभिर्द्विजैः ।
सीतां विना वनं रामो गतः किं कुत्रचिद्वद ॥

† Vālmiki : I. 16.

अवज्ञाताः पुरा तेन वरदाने हि मानवाः ।
तस्मात्तस्य वधो दृष्टो मानुषेभ्यः परंतप ॥

The *Uttarakāṇḍa*, canto 10, describes in detail the terrific penance performed by Rāvaṇa in order to obtain from Brahmā the boon of invincibility against the Devas, Asuras, Rakshasas, Yakshas, Gandharvas and other divine or semi-divine beings. Being conscious of his superiority to all earthly creatures, he scorned to include men and monkeys among his possible adversaries. God Viṣṇu took advantage of this omission in order to destroy him. He was therefore born a man, his angels appearing as monkeys to assist him.

The *Adhyātma* also says the same thing in the *Balakāṇḍa* : 2.

विष्णुर्मानुषरूपेण भविष्यति रघोः कुले ।
देवाः सृजध्वं सर्वेऽपि वानरेष्वंशसंभवान् ।
विष्णोः सहायं कुरुत यावत्स्थास्यति भूतले ॥

(Continued on next page)

disgrace by an ugly sage, and so was her mind suddenly corrupted by the malicious hunchback;* Daśaratha had already been cursed to fatal separation from his dearest son, and the curse simply took

(Continued from the previous page)

But it adds elsewhere that Rāvaṇa was destroyed by men and monkeys, not merely because in asking the boon of invulnerability from Brahmā, he had failed to name them as his dangerous rivals, but because in cursing him for his arrogance, Nandi had explicitly mentioned them as his mortal enemies in the end : VII. 2:—

रावणो विजयी लोकान्सर्वाञ्जित्वा क्रमेण तु ।
कैलासं तोलयामास बाहुभिः परिशोपमैः ।
तत्र नन्दीश्वरेणैवं शप्तोऽयं राक्षसेश्वरः ।
वानरैर्मानुषैश्चैव नाशं गच्छेति कोपिना ॥

* *Vālmāki* : II. 9.

केकयेषु हि सा बाला ब्राह्मणं रूक्षरूपिणम् ।
असूयितवती बाल्ये, तेन शप्ता महात्मना ।
यस्मादसूयसे विप्रं त्वं रूपमददर्पिता ।
तस्मादसूयां त्वमपि लोके प्राप्स्यसि कुत्सिताम् ।
इति शापसमाच्छन्ना मन्थरावशमागता ॥

The *Adhyātma*, however, says that the sudden change in the mind of Kaikeyi and Mantharā was effected by the Goddess of speech, not as a punishment for any fault of theirs, but simply at the pressing request of the gods to upset anyhow all arrangements made by Daśaratha for the installation of Rāma:—

The *Adhyātma* : II. 2.

एतस्मिन्नन्तरे देवा देवीं वाणीमचोदयन् ।
गच्छ देवि भुवो लोकमयोध्यायां प्रयत्नतः ।
रामाभिषेकविघ्नार्थं यतस्व ब्रह्मवाक्यतः ॥

effect in due course* ! Thus since the law of predeter-

* Valmiki : II. 64.

यः शरैर्नैकपुत्रं मां त्वमकार्षीरपुत्रकम् ।
तेन त्वामपि शप्स्येऽहं सुदुःखमतिदारुणम् ।
पुत्रव्यसनजं दुःखं यदेतन्मम सांप्रतम् ।
एवं त्वं पुत्रशोकेन राजन्कालं करिष्यसि ॥

The Adhyātma also says that Daśaratha had once unwittingly shot dead a young ascetic, Śrāvapa by name, and was in consequence cursed by his old blind parents that he too would suffer the agony of separation from his son and die, like them, of broken heart:—

तत्र वृद्धः पिता आह त्वंमप्येवं भविष्यसि ।
पुत्रशोकेन मरणं प्राप्स्यसे वचनान्मम ।
स इदानीं मया प्राप्तः शापकालोऽनिवारितः ।
इत्युक्त्वा विललापाथ राजा शोकसमाकुलः ॥

Tulasidāsa, however, refers but faintly to this curse and expatiates on another legend to give the mournful occurrence a beatific touch. In fact, according to him, the death of Daśaratha was not so much the effect of a curse inflicted upon him, as the fruit of a boon conferred on him. He says that God Viṣṇu, pleased with the devotions of Manu, promised him that he would incarnate himself as a son to him, when he was born in Ayodhyā as Daśaratha. Manu thereupon begged as an additional favour that his paternal attachment to the godly son should be such that in case there was separation from him, his own life, like that of a fish out of water, should forthwith depart from his body.

Tulasi : I.

बंदि चरन मनु कहेउ बहोरी ।
अउर एक बिनती प्रभु मोरी ॥
सुत विपयिक तव पद रति होऊ ।
मोहि बड मूढ कहइ किन कोऊ ॥
मनि बिनु फनि जिमि जल बिनु मीना ।
मम जीवन तिमि तुझहि अधीना ॥

mination worked through the entire course of happenings, independently of human will, the lovers of the Rāmāyaṇa naturally say that to discuss the logic of any event, or the propriety of anybody's act, is sheer impudence, or why, a veritable sin. Brahmā in his contemplative mood ordered that it should be so and it was so. Who are we to challenge his design ! Was Vālmīki a fool, or Vyāsa a dunce, or Tulasi an ass, when they acquiesced in his arrangement ! They have interpreted to us the ways of Heaven. Let us ponder over their works in good faith ! Away with all impertinent questions ! Come, let us recount the deeds of Rāma and repeat his name and recite hallelujahs to him ! *That* is the way to salvation; the reverse is a descent to perdition.* The rise and fall of the world around us are entirely God's concern. Why need we bother about them ? Has He not graciously assured us : "For the protection of the good and for the destruction of

* *Vālmīki* : I. 1.

यः पठेद्रामचरितं सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते ।

सपुत्रपौत्रः सगणः प्रेत्य स्वर्गे महीयते ॥

Every work on the Life of Rāma, great or small, makes a promise of unlimited reward to its readers. Whosoever reads a single line before breakfast or before going to bed must have flourishing prosperity while alive and everlasting bliss after death. It is these flattering assurances which, though not intended by their authors to be taken literally, have obviated the necessity of intelligent study and encouraged blind faith in mechanical reading.

the wicked, for the re-establishment of righteousness, do I take birth in every age ? ”* Therefore since God has taken upon Himself the heavy task of looking to the moral order of the world, all that remains now for us to do is to look to our own self and be, like Rāma, subservient to our parents, faithful to our wives, and genial to our brothers. If we do that, our heaven is secured !

In this way in Hindu society the cultivation of these homely virtues became the be-all and end-all of life. I do not deny that these are excellent traits of character, but I cannot help saying that they are conducive only to domestic peace and happiness. Homes may well thrive upon them, but nations thrive upon a much sterner stuff. They require for their prosperous rise, dauntless courage and impetuous vigour, enterprising spirit and resourceful genius, unshakable confidence in self and unflinching devotion to the native land. It is these qualities which make a people worthy of name and place in the world. Without them no nation can hope to survive in the dire struggle for existence, with vultures hovering above and crocodiles lurking below. And it is because we lost sight of these sterling, manly characteristics of Rāma and idealised only

* The *Gītā* : IV. 8.

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे ॥

So also *Vālmiki* : VII. 8.

नष्टधर्मव्यवस्थानां काले काले प्रजाकरः ।
उत्पद्यते दस्युवधे शरणागतवत्सलः ॥

the supposedly tender emotions of his that we fell, and so disastrous has been that fall that we have now no place of honour under the sun; whatever place we have is by sufferance and not by right.

Vālmiki alone in my opinion studied the greatness of Rāma from the national point of view. To him Rāma was great, not for how he behaved towards the members of his family, but for what he did for the members of the Aryan stock in India. Vālmiki therefore deserves the first place among poets not so much on account of his precedence in time, as because of his predominance in merit. Thanks to the careful investigations of Professor Jacobi, all scholars are now agreed that his original Epic consisted of five books only, from the Ayodhyākāṇḍa to the Lankākāṇḍa; that is to say, it dealt mainly with the departure of Rāma from home in a hermit's garb, his daring march through the dreaded region of the south, and his return home from Lankā in glorious triumph. It is the later rhapsodists who, to meet the demands of the popular taste, prefixed the Bālākāṇḍa in the beginning and suffixed the Uttarakāṇḍa at the end, and made several additions and alterations in the body of the Epic itself, so as to transfigure a human hero into a divine incarnation. The Uttarakāṇḍa is obviously an outgrowth, not an integral part of the original Epic; for the Lankākāṇḍa ends with the customary benedictory pronouncement

upon the readers,* and this leaves no doubt in the mind that Vālmiki concluded his historical poem with the coronation of Rāma in Ayodhyā. Again, the Bālakāṇḍa, besides having several passages that conflict with the statements of the later books, contains two tables of contents, one of which takes no notice at all of the first and last books, and must, therefore, have been made before these were prefixed and suffixed. In the remaining five books not only the original cantos have been altered and amplified, but new ones also have been inserted. The addition of the Bālakāṇḍa required the shifting of a few opening cantos of Book II to the beginning of Book I. All these changes are easy to discern. C. V. Vaidya has in his *Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa* carefully pointed out how the interpolations are sometimes mere repetitions in a longer metre of what has already been said before in the usual shorter metre, sometimes fulsome exaggerations of the marvellous, sometimes loosely connected or altogether disconnected with the context, sometimes flatly contradictory to what precedes or succeeds, sometimes only conventional descriptions of sights and seasons, sometimes elaborate speeches on law and morality, sometimes long drawn-out lamentations and eulogies. In the course

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 128.

आदिकाव्यमिदं चार्षं पुरा वाल्मीकिना कृतम् ।
यः शृणोति सदा लोके नरः पापात्प्रमुच्यते ।
रामायणमिदं कृत्स्नं शृण्वतः पठतः सदा ।
प्रीयते सततं रामः स हि विष्णुः सनातनः ।
एवमेतत्पुरावृत्तमाख्यानं भद्रमस्तु वः ॥

of our narrative there will be occasions to refer to some of the absurdities and inconsistencies that crept in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as it underwent modifications at the hands of its several editors. However, a considerable time must have elapsed between the composition of the original Epic and its enlargement to the present size. It is indeed interesting to notice, as one carefully goes through the whole work, how the tribal hero of the original poem has, in the revised portions of the five books, been transformed into a national hero, the moral ideal of the people, and finally, in the two additional books, been completely identified with Viṣṇu, the Lord of the Universe.*

However much we may regret this transfiguration of history into mythology, yet to be fair to the several editors and amplifiers of Vālmiki, we must admit that this deification of Rāma was chiefly necessitated by the phenomenal rise and spread of Buddhism, which threatened to sweep the esta-

* 'In its present form Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* consists of about 24000 verses. It has been preserved in three distinct texts—the Bombay, the Bengal, and the Central Indian. About one-third of the verses in each of these three texts occurs in neither of the other two. Thus it is only 8000 verses which are common to all, and these may be supposed to constitute Vālmiki's original epic. It is also interesting to notice that whereas the Bombay text preserves the irregularities of the old epic language, the other two texts are mostly free from these archaisms'. For further particulars see Macdonell's and Winternitz's *History of Skt. Lit.* The Bombay text being obviously the oldest, I have used it exclusively as my authority in this book.

blished Vedic religion clean out of existence. The Buddhists in their zeal for the enlightened founder of their Faith began to worship him as an incarnation of the Supreme Being, and invented stories of his successive births in the past to trace the gradual passage of his benevolent Self from the lowest to the highest form of life and through the various strata of society. Naturally their religion, centred round so catholic a personality as Gautama's, made a lively appeal to the imagination and sentiment of the vast majority of people, and in consequence the orthodox Aryans found their own abstruse religion in danger of rapid desertion. For the masses can never feel real attachment to that religion which, instead of putting salvation within easy reach of all without distinction, makes it the monopoly of the select few,* which represents God as an Amorphous Being who sits invisible on Olympian heights and

* The *Gītā* : VII.

मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।

यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥

बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते ।

वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥

i. e. Among thousands of men scarce one striveth for perfection; of the successful strivers scarce one knoweth Me in essence. At the close of many births does a man acquire true knowledge and realise that every thing is God: then only does he come unto Me. Indeed, such a man whose soul embraces the whole Universe is very difficult to find.

looks down upon all with callous indifference,* who listens to prayers only when they are couched in a mystic language which the few are authorised to learn and the many are even forbidden to hear,† who strikes the sinners down without mercy and

* The Gītā :

मूढोऽयं नाभिजानाति लोको मामजमव्यम् ।
अनिर्देश्यमचिन्त्यं च अव्यक्तमचलं ध्रुवम् ।
उदासीनवदासीनमसक्तं तेषु कर्मसु ।
न मां दुष्कृतिनो मूढाः प्रपद्यन्ते नराधमाः ।
मोहजालसमाविष्टाः पतन्ति नरकेऽप्युचौ ।
भ्रामयन्सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ।

i. e. Immersed in ignorance, people fail to see that I am really unborn, immutable, ineffable, inscrutable, unmanifest, immovable, and eternal, sitting on high unconcernedly and unattached to actions. The sinful, the deluded, the vilest among mankind have no access to me : enmeshed in the web of delusion, they all fall into a foul hell. Indeed, all beings are fastened to the universal machine of cause and effect, and I cause them to revolve helplessly by My illusive power.

† *Mamu* : VIII. X.

दास्याय शूद्रः सृष्टोऽसौ ब्राह्मणस्य स्वयंभुवा ।
नास्याधिकारो धर्मोऽस्ति न च संस्कारमर्हति ।
विवाहादि पुनस्तस्य मन्त्रवर्जं विधीयते ।
उच्छिष्टमस्मै दातव्यं जीर्णानि वसनानि च ।
धर्मोपदेशं दर्पेण विप्राणामस्य कुर्वतः ।
तप्तमासेचयेत्तैलं वक्त्रे श्रोत्रे च पार्थिवः ।

i. e. Born for slavery only, a Śūdra has no voice in religious matters and deserves no sacrament. He is to be given only the leavings of food and tattered garments. Should he presume to teach a Brahmin what the true meaning of religion is, boiling oil should be poured into his mouth and ears,

never cares to come down in person to heal their stricken souls,* who is a Puritan to the core and never a Samaritan by an inch. They are naturally attracted to that religion which represents God as a Humane Being† who lives in their midst and partakes of their humble fare with a genuine relish, who rejoiceth in their joys and grieveth in their sorrows, who helps them in need, comforts them in misery, and consoles them in calamity. The Buddhists presented their Gautama to the masses now as a bird, now as an animal, now as a man, but always doing acts of kindness, reconciling differences, cementing breaches, pacifying feuds, himself suffering to relieve

* The *Gītā* : XVI.

तानहं द्विषतः क्रूरान्संसारेषु नराधमान् ।
क्षिपाम्यजस्रमद्युमान् आसुरीष्वेव योनिषु ॥

† The *Gītā* : IX.

ये भजन्ति तु मां भक्त्या मयि ते तेषु चाप्यहम् ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥
मां तु पार्थ व्यपाश्रित्य येऽपि स्युः पापयोनयः ।
स्त्रियो वैश्यास्तथा शूद्रास्तेऽपि यान्ति परां गतिम् ॥
पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।
तदहं भक्त्युपहृतमश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥
अपि चेत्स दुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।
साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग् व्यवसितो हि सः ॥

i. e. They are in Me, and I also in them, who worship Me with true devotion. I look to the moral and material welfare of my true devotees. Even those who are born in hidden shame, women, vaiśyas, śūdras, they also tread the highest path, if they take refuge in Me. Whatever is offered to Me with devotion, be it a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water, that I accept gladly. Even the most sinful I call righteous, if he worships Me.

others; in short, mingling his soul with all irrespective of caste and creed, rank and wealth.

This conception of God naturally endeared Buddhism to the masses, whereas the Vedic conception, though sound in theory, made Hinduism repellent to them. The life of Rāma, however, apart from his political and military achievements, was in Vālmiki's Epic depicted so pure, noble, and exalted that his hold on their mind as an ideal man remained firm as before. Hence the Buddhists tried to enlist him also on their side by transcribing his legend into their own language and representing him as a former Buddha in the Daśaratha Jātaka. The orthodox Aryans thereupon took alarm. They could not afford to sit idle any longer and let things go their own way. The *laissez faire* policy of theirs in religion was working distinctly in their disfavour. They took up the cudgels in self-defence after this theft of their national hero. He was their champion of the True Religion in the past and they could not tolerate his representation as a pioneer in Infidelism. They first started reviling Buddha and inserted the following condemnation of him in the Rāmāyaṇa itself*—

‘ This Buddha is no better than a thief. Know him to be a dangerous heretic as well as a down-

* Vālmiki : II. 109.

यथा हि चोरः स तथा हि बुद्धः ।
 तथागतं नास्तिकमत्र विद्धि ।
 तस्माद्धि यः शक्यतमः प्रजानां ।
 स नास्तिके नाभिमुखो बुधः स्यात् ॥

right hypocrite. He pretends to spiritual realisation and preaches unbelief in the divine Revelation. A wise man, therefore, should as far as possible avoid this arch-enemy of the Veda, this denouncer of the Eternal Order'.

But this did not in any way affect the growing popularity of Buddhism. The orthodox Aryans, therefore, changed their tactics and sought to beat the Buddhists at their own weapons. They took kindly to Gautama, called him an enlightened person, and spoke of his tirade against the Veda as only a condemnation of the brutal excesses that had crept in under the name of Vedic religion. They adopted the Buddhistic idea of God's incarnations in various forms to do good to the creatures in general and to mankind in particular. Having adopted that idea, they did not slavishly imitate it. They improved upon it and gave it a scientific form. They did not make their God descend to the earth oft and on to intervene, like Don Quixote, in petty squabbles, troubles, and afflictions, as the Buddhists did theirs in their Birth Stories, but as a Saviour at tremendous upheavals and great crises, when human effort seems unequal and divine interference is sincerely prayed for by every one.* In this way, out of the confused mass

* The *Gītā* : IV. 7.

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

i. e. Whenever righteousness is helplessly on the decline and wickedness is aggressively in the ascendant, then do I myself come forth to restore order in chaos,

of the Jātakas they built up their grand *Daśāvatāra* theory, which is now the true backbone of Hinduism. It is this, rather than *Śankarāchārya's* dialectical battery, which saved Hinduism then from the onslaught of Buddhism and has saved it against the successive impacts of other *isms* of the world till now. The orthodox Aryans showed their largeness of heart, as also their acute sense, by giving Gautam a place, in order of time, among the ten incarnations of God Viṣṇu.

But as the Vedic conception of the Supreme Being as impersonal, indifferent, and divested of form-quality-and-action had to be maintained along with this new idea of the Supreme Being as personal, interested and possessed of form-quality-and-action, discrepancies crept into the later sacred works, which the commentators were hard put to reconcile, and this gave rise to endless controversies. To quote one single instance out of many from the *Bhagavadgītā*, at one place we have—

‘The foolish think of me, who am the subtle Universal spirit, as having manifestation in a gross individual body. They know not my supreme nature which is imperishable and most excellent.’*

At another place we have—

‘The foolish disregard me, when I incarnate

* The *Gītā* : VII. 24.

अव्यक्तं व्यक्तिमापन्नं मन्यन्ते मामबुद्धयः ।
परं भावमजानन्तो ममाव्ययमनुत्तमम् ॥

myself in human form. They know not my supreme nature which lords over all beings.*

It is this opposition of the old philosophical view which could not be discarded, and the new mythological view, which had to be accepted, that gave the classical poets wide scope to indulge in quibbles and paradoxes, such as —

‘Lord Krishna, by whose very belly, while reposing on the ocean, the worlds innumerable were swallowed up at the time of universal dissolution—he was now drunk up all at once by one city woman, and with a single eye, and that too not fully open owing to intoxication of love.†

Howsoever opposed to the Vedic conception of *Parabrahma* as mere Entity, divested of form, destitute of qualities, and devoid of interest in the perpetual interplay of causes and effects in the moral and material world, the *Daśāvatāra* theory is peculiarly consistent in itself and highly thought-provoking. If we place the ten incarnations in serial order before our eyes and let our mind dwell upon them in all seriousness, the impression is irresistible that they

* The *Gītā* : IX. 11.

अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् ।
परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् ॥

† *Māgha* : XIII.

विपुलेन सागरशयस्य कुक्षिणा
भवनानि यस्य पपिरे युगक्षये ।
मदविभ्रमासकलया पपे पुनः
स पुरस्त्रियैकतमयैकया दृशा ॥

represent the gradual evolution of life from a lower to a higher stage. Both the scientists and philosophers say that in the beginning there was water everywhere and that land emerged therefrom afterwards. In the Brhadāranyaka as well as in the philosophy of Thales, a Greek sage of the sixth century before Christ, it is emphatically stated that the original stuff of the world was water. It is, therefore, natural that organic life should make its first appearance in water. Hence the first *Avatāra* is *Matsya**, the Fish, an animal living in water only. Though it has a body, yet the body has no limbs, which means that when life manifested itself in visible form, the form was capable of movement, but had no complexity of structure.

Next we have *Kūrma*,† the Tortoise, a much bigger and tougher animal which, though mainly aquatic, is yet not altogether helpless on land and hence is called amphibious. Another point to be noticed about the tortoise is that though it displays limbs, yet these are disproportionately small in comparison with the bulk of the body; hence its

* Jayadeva :

प्रलयपयोधिजले धृतवानसिवेदं
विहितवह्निचरिन्मखेदम् ।
केशव धृतमीनशरीर जय जगदीश हरे ॥

† Jayadeva :

क्षितिरतिविपुलतरे तव तिष्ठति पृष्ठे
धरणिधरणंकिणचक्रगरिष्ठे ।
केशव धृतकच्छपरूप जय जगदीश हरे ॥

movement, though fairly quick in water, is proverbially slow on land.

Next we come to *Varāha**, the Boar, a strong and powerful animal with well-developed limbs. Though it really belongs to land, where its headlong rush scares all opposition out of the way, it is yet so fond of water that its special delight is said to lie in wallowing in marshy places and dipping in muddy pools, which shows that since life originated in water, it carried with it the love of its native element in passing on to the land stage.

Next we come to *Narasimha*,† the Man-lion, in whom we have the best of animals, lion, with a marked tendency towards a species of a higher type, man.‡ One point that is worth noticing here is that

* Ibid :

वसति दशनशिखरे धरणी तव लग्ना
शशिनि कलंककलेव निमग्ना ।
केशव धृतशूकररूप जय जगदीश हरे ॥

† Ibid : तव करकमलवरे नखमद्भुतशृंगं

दलितहिरण्यकशिपुतनुभृंगम् ।
केशव धृतनरहरिरूप जय जगदीश हरे ॥

‡ It is impossible for a scientist to believe that man was created by a process of clay modelling and woman by the transformation of a rib. All the evidence points to a different conception of the origin of life : the development from primaeval scum, through millions of years, of colloidal compounds in the great seas and swamps of the cooling earth; the timeless evolution of these protoplasmic forms, through the amphibians and reptiles, birds and mammals, to the apes and men—a truly remarkable process which makes us and monkeys brothers, practically under our skins.

—Dr. A. J. Cronin

in Narasimha the head is that of a lion and the body from the neck downwards is that of a man, which means that animal nature is still dominant at this stage and that human limbs are only accessory to the brute force : Witness the typically brutal manner in which God fulfilled his purpose in this incarnation. The demon Hiranyakaśipu was seized unawares from behind a clustered column, laid sprawling on the lap with a stifling grip, and torn open in the middle with pointed fingernails; and finally he had all his entrails pulled out from his gashful belly !

Next we have *Vamana**, the Dwarf, who is completely human in form from top to toe, but altogether stunted in growth, with all his higher faculties in embryo. The scientists also tell us that man in the beginning was weakest in the whole creation and had to shift for himself as best as he could in the dire struggle for existence. Cunning and deception, disguise and concealment were his weapons then. And God also in this incarnation effected his purpose by pretended humility, by fraudulent beggary, and by kicking the head of the very Demon at whose feet he had supplicated for a paltry gift. This can hardly be called a noble act. And God has shown by his own example that though one might succeed this way, yet one would never be happy in the end : God himself had to accept eternal slavery in the underworld as a

* Ibid :

छलयसि विक्रमणे बलिमद्भुतवामन
पदनखनीरजनितजनपावन ।
केशव धृतवामनरूप जय जगदीश हरे ॥

punishment for his underhand dealing. Our experience of life also tells us that tallness of stature often goes with loftiness of soul; whereas shortness of stature is generally seen to shelter meanness of mind.

Next we come to *Paraśurāma**, the Axe-man, mighty of body and armed with weapons, vigorous in mind and versed in sacred lore, but lacking entirely the sweetness and grace of humanity. When man discovered the use of weapons for the first time and experienced their effectiveness, he felt that he was thereby the lord of all he surveyed. He relied solely upon weapon as the surest and shortest cut to success, but he soon learnt that it also cut short his peace and happiness, without which success itself was not worth having, nor life worth living. Paraśurāma cut off his mother's head coolly at the impulsive wish of his father; and at the assassination of his father by a Kshatriya king, he vowed vengeance upon the entire royal race. This race he sought to exterminate twenty-one times with astounding success. He filled five lakes with the blood of slain warriors and therewith performed the funeral rites of his father. Indeed, vindictiveness could go no further. Dreaded and shunned by all, he led a desolate and disconsolate life. His logic was always blunt, and he compensated for its bluntness by pointing constantly to the sharp-

* Ibid :

क्षत्रियरुधिरमये जगदपगतपापं

स्नपयसि पयसि शमितभवतापम् ।

केशव धृतभृगुपतिरूप जय जगदीश हरे ॥

ness of his axe. This point has been well brought out, with a touch of humour, by Tulasidāsa in his *Rāma-charita-mānasa* when, towards the end of his career, he had his last altercation with the Kshatriya prince Rāma about a trifle.

Next we come to *Rāma**, the Lovable man, who joined a sweet temper to a heroic spirit, and a pleasing manner to a virtuous life. If Paraśurāma disregarded the feelings of others, Rāma had so much regard for them that he entirely disregarded himself. In consequence his life was one of suffering and sacrifice. Though he had the spiritual satisfaction of having done his duty, he had no physical comfort for all his pains. Even when he was invested with royal robes towards the end of his career, his soul remained in sackcloth and ashes owing to the abandonment of his beloved spouse under public pressure. Out of the four ends of human life, namely, fulfilment of duty, acquisition of wealth, enjoyment of pleasure, and attainment of bliss, he succeeded in achieving three, but failed to have enjoyment in life. Hence he is called in our mythology *Amsāvātāra*, a partial incarnation of the Supreme Being.

* Ibid :

वितरसि दिक्षु रणे दिक्पतिकमनीयं
दशमुखमौलिब्रलिं रमणीयम् ।
केशव धृतरामशरीर जग जगदीश हरे ॥

Next we come to *Krishna**, the Perfect man, in whom we see the balance of all qualities—physical and intellectual, moral and spiritual, and the realisation of all the ends of human life. Throughout his career he displayed the vivacity of boyhood, the vigour of youth, and the wisdom of age. He performed his arduous tasks to the full, enjoyed the sensuous pleasures to his fill, and probed the problems of life to the bottom. Indeed, never shrinking from duty—howsoever painful, never sinking into despair—howsoever black, never stinting in effort—howsoever strenuous, he ran the race of his life with buoyancy in his heart, music in his soul, and a happy smile upon his face. Gentle, yet stern; just, but kind; attentive to all things, though attached to none, Lord Krishna remains for ever an idol to the devout and an ideal to the thoughtful.

Next we come to *Buddha*,† the Enlightened, in whom the masterly equipoise attained by Lord

* The Bhāgawata :

अन्ये चाल्पकलाः पुंसः

कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम् ।

Strangely enough, Jayadeva does not take Krishna, but his elder brother Balarama, to be the eighth incarnation :—

वहसि वपुषि विशदे वसनं जलदामं

हलहतिभीतिमिलितयमुनाभम् ।

केशव धृतहलधररूप जय जगदीश हरे ॥

† Ibid : निन्दसि यज्ञविधेरहह श्रुतिजातं

सदयहृदय दर्शितपशुघातम् ।

केशव धृतबुद्धशरीर जय जगदीश हरे ॥

Kṛṣṇa was lost. Buddha had a decided leaning towards renunciation as against full realisation of one's responsibilities in life. He favoured detached contemplation in preference to disinterested action, passive forbearance of wrong for the sake of peace instead of active opposition to it in the interest of justice, exaltation of *nirvāṇa*, extinction, over *nirmāṇa*, creation. He forgot that man is neither body alone nor soul alone, but a composite, like air and water, of both; hence it is imperative to attend to both in due proportion. Indeed, it is as criminal to starve the senses as to stifle the self, as stupid to forego material happiness here as to forfeit ethereal bliss hereafter. The biased way of life and thought, as it spread among the masses, lifted them airily into—fool's paradise, and launched them imperceptibly into—political demise. The mighty and magnificent Maurya Empire, so assiduously built up by Chāṇakya and Chandragupta, fell to pieces immediately after Aśoka, because throughout his reign he encouraged monasticism and mendicancy: the former led to the unnatural suppression of natural appetites, and begot in its turn secret indulgence of lusts and sanctimonious hypocrisy; the latter offended against the economic and political laws, and brought in its wake stagnation of effort and indolent ease. The revival of India came under the Śūngas and the Guptas who were both staunch Hindus. Harshavar-dhana of Kanoje again leaned on the side of Buddhism, and thereafter India fell helplessly under foreign domination. Though the circumstances had compelled the inclusion of Buddha in the galaxy

of ten incarnations, yet he has no place of worship in the Hindu household, nor any shrine worth the name in India.

Lastly we come to *Kalki**, the Destroyer. This *Avatāra* is still to happen, but the coming event of total annihilation has already begun to cast its grim shadow before. With the upsetting of the social arrangement and the clear-cut division of labour established by the Aryan sages of old, the forces of disruption are gradually coming to a head. We have already arrived at the stage when, under the name of some *ism*, we preach insubordination to authority, contempt for law and order, irreverence of all that is holy and majestic, grand and sublime. The dregs of society are coming to the surface, spreading anarchy and confusion everywhere. Hunger and discontent; uncertainty and restlessness; outward controls and inner black dealings; suppression of truth and propagation of falsehood; class war, communal strife, industrial dishonesty and official corruption—all these are like the distant rumblings of a volcano. Those on the lowest rung are bent upon pulling the social ladder down, forgetting in the enthusiasm of the moment that when the crash comes, they too, along with the rest, will be smothered in the debris. This is what the ancient seers foresaw long ago and

* *Jayaādeva* :

म्लेच्छनिवहनिधने कलयसि करवालं
धूमकेतुमिव किमपि करालम् ।
केशव धृतकल्किशरीर जय जगदीश हरे ॥

we now see with our own eyes. This is the meaning of *Kalki-Avatāra*.

Having considered how with the rise and spread of Buddhism, mythology came to the forefront and transfigured the historical heroes of the past into divine incarnations, we now come back to our Vālmiki. To Vālmiki himself Rāma was but a mortal being who had immortalised himself by his singular achievement. Therefore to him what appealed most about Rama was his career in exile; *that* was the best part of Rāma's life, *that* the solid foundation of his fame, *that* which gained him a shrine all over India and in the hearts of all. He, therefore, began his Epic with the circumstances which led to the banishment of Rāma from Ayodhyā and ended it with his triumphant return from Lanka. Naturally the only appropriate name he could give his work was *Rāmāyaṇa*, the wanderings of Rāma, the path he went by after his disinheritance. Thus the title has a peculiar significance and is meant to focus our attention on what Rāma achieved during his exile, because in that achievement lies the *Rāmatva* of Rāma. My purpose here is to indicate the supreme importance of the task undertaken by him and to expound the methods employed by him in carrying it through. Hence it is necessary to cast our glance back to a remote period of ancient history when the Aryans first set their foot on Indian soil.

CHAPTER II

The Background

Where did the Aryans come from ? About their original homeland there is a bewildering diversity of opinion among scholars. Max Muller takes his stand upon the Pamir plateau in Central Asia; Dr. Latham suggests Scandinavia; Dr. Giles favours Hungary; Prof. Schrader holds tenaciously to the northern shores of the Caspian sea; Lokamānya Tilak argues ably for the Arctic region. The story of the Tower of Babel has guided some to the rich plain of Shinar in Asia Minor; whereas the discovery of the names of Vedic divinities in the Hittite inscriptions has led some to the upper reaches of the Euphrates and the Tigris. Howsoever widely the scholars may differ about the location of the Aryan homeland, there is a surprising agreement among them on two points; firstly, that whichever the homeland may be, it was not India; secondly, that the Aryans must have lived together in one place for a considerable time before spreading out and splitting up into a number of small communities, the nuclei of modern nations. Those who bent their steps towards India, says Grierson, did not come in one single invasion or wave of immigration; but clan after clan, speaking closely related and mutually understandable dialects, arrived during a long period of years and occupied in successive stages the whole of Hindustan.

This view, apart from linguistic considerations, is largely supported by Manu's mention of four regions of Aryan settlement in India. The country where the Aryans settled first was *Brahmāvarta**, the five-river tract of the Punjab between the Indus and the Sarasvati. When their numbers increased, they moved to *Brahmarshideśa*,† which extended over the valleys of the Ganges and the Jumna from the neighbourhood of Delhi as far as Muttra. Then they occupied *Madhyadeśa*,‡ which stretched from the place where the river Sarasvati disappeared in the Hissar districts to the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna at Allahabad. Lastly they expanded over the whole of *Āryāvarta*,§ which extended from sea to sea between the Himalayas and the Vindhya. The expression 'from sea to sea' is rather vague, in as much as the latitude of both *Brahmāvarta* and *Brahmarshideśa* on one side, and of Bengal on the

* Manu : II

सरस्वतीद्विपद्वयोर्देवनद्योर्यदन्तरम् ।
तं देवनिमित्तं देशं ब्रह्मावर्तं प्रचक्षते ॥

† Manu : II

कुरुक्षेत्रं च मत्स्याश्च पञ्चालाः शूरसेनकाः ।
एष ब्रह्मर्षिदेशो वै ब्रह्मावर्तादनन्तरः ॥

‡ Ibid : II

हिमवद्विन्ध्ययोर्मध्यं यत्प्राग्विनशानादपि ।
प्रत्यगेव प्रयागाच्च मध्यदेशः प्रकीर्तितः ॥

§ Ibid : II

आ समुद्रात्तु वै पूर्वादासमुद्रात्तु पश्चिमात् ।
तयोरैवान्तरं गिर्योरार्यावर्तं विदुर्बुधाः ॥

other, lies far to the north of the sea-coast. We may, however, assume that in ancient times the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal extended sufficiently far to the northwards to form the western and eastern boundaries of Āryāvarta.

About *Devas*, the reputed denizens of heaven, *Asuras*, the aerial adversaries of the gods, and *Rākshasas*, the earthly enemies of mankind, there is such a bewildering diversity of Vedic and Pauranik account that scholars are not unanimous in assigning a definite historical meaning to these words. Taking the *Devas* to be the idealised forefathers of the Aryans who came and settled in India, some scholars argue that since the *Devas* and the *Asuras* are said to be the progeny of Kaśyapa by two different wives, they both were related as half-brothers and thus formed two separate branches of the same family; but in course of time they came to hate each other bitterly on account of the former's indulgence in liquor and the latter's abhorrence of it.* Thus, according to these scholars, what the teetotallers are today to the bacchanals, so were the so-called *Asuras* to the *Aryans* of old. The *Rākshasas*, on the other hand, were entirely different; they were the barbarous aborigines—mostly addicted to canni-

* *Vālmāki* : I. 45.

दितेः पुत्रा न तां राम जग्रदुर्वारुणीं सुराम् ।
 अदितेस्तु सुता वीर जग्रदुस्तामनिन्दिताम् ॥
 असुरास्तेन दैतेयाः सुरास्तेनादितेः सुताः ।
 दृष्ट्वाः प्रमुदिताश्चासन्वाक्प्रीतिं हृणात्सुराः ॥

alism, to sorcery, to woman-stealing and to other malpractices. As they are everywhere represented as dark complexioned and broad-jawed, these scholars are inclined to look upon them as the parent race of the Dravidians of south India.

Other scholars hold just the opposite view and say that the *Rākshasas* must not be confounded with the cannibal heathens known as the *Asuras*. Their argument is worth considering. They lay special stress on the fact that while the *Asuras* are sometimes shown inimical and sometimes amicable to the *Devas*, the *Rākshasas* are always shown irreconcilable in the *Purāṇas*. It is indeed curious, they observe, that while Rāvana and others are said to be the worshippers of Brahmā, the orthodox deity of the Aryans, they are always shown to be violently opposed to the Brahmanical sacrifices. This opposition of theirs to the sacrificing Brahmins, they argue, must be viewed in the light of a sectarian opposition, like that of Protestantism to Roman Catholicism, in which there is generally less toleration and infinitely more virulence than where the difference of religious belief is more thorough and complete. All this, they conclude, points to the identification of the *Rākshasas* with the Buddhists who flourished in India from 600 B. C. to 800 A. D. and established an empire in Ceylon which has continued to the present day.

A few scholars differ entirely from both and are of opinion that it is the aboriginal inhabitants of India who are alluded to under different names, such as *Rākshasas*, *Asuras*, *Daityas*, and *Dānavas*. These

names, they say, must have originally belonged to different tribes of aborigines, but at a subsequent period the names were applied indiscriminately to the aborigines in general. Their opposition to the Kshatriyas, they say, was the natural opposition of the people of the country to the advancing tide of Aryan invasion. Their intolerance of the Brahmanical sacrifices, they argue, was obviously due to superstitious fears, natural to the savages, at finding their country overrun by invaders who were irresistible in their might and whose might seemed to have been derived from the mystic rites which the Brahmin priests performed for them. It is this third view which appears to me most convincing and I have accepted it, with some variations here and there, in the treatment of my subject. I have taken *Asura* and *Rākshasa* as the significant names given by the earliest Aryan invaders to their inveterate foes in India. Secondly, I do not look upon the original inhabitants of this land as ignorant, uncultured brutes, but as a race of people far more advanced than the Peruvians and the Mexicans of old, and endowed with all those qualities which the German word *Kultur* conventionally signifies. With these preliminary remarks I now proceed to trace briefly the course of events which led to the decisive clash between Rāma and Rāvaṇa.

Long, long ago when the Aryans first came to India in search of a fertile tract for settlement, this land of ours was in the possession of Non-aryan people. These are spoken of in our mythology as

*Asura**, 'sound in breath', i. e. virile, and as *Rākshasa*†, 'whom one must carefully guard against,' i. e. dangerous. Both these words clearly indicate that they were not weak-kneed people, but hard of body, ferocious by nature, and willing to live, yet ready to die. Naturally they did not receive the new comers with open arms or with folded hands; they stoutly opposed them tooth and nail. Hence the struggle that followed was grim, lasting for several years. At length by virtue of superior tactics and

* In the oldest part of the R̥gveda the term *Asura* is used for the Supreme Spirit and also applied to several of the chief deities, such as Indra, Agni, and Varuṇa. Afterwards it acquired an entirely opposite meaning and came to signify a demon or an enemy of the gods. The Brahmayas state that Prajāpati created *Asuras* from the lower breath, *asu*. The Vāyu Purāṇa says that *Asuras* were first produced as sons from Prajāpati's groin. Taking all these and other meanings into account, the Nirukta derives the word variously :—

असुः प्राणस्तेन तद्वन्तो भवन्ति । सोः प्रशस्तादात्मनः प्रदेशाद् देवानसृजत
तत्सुराणां सुरत्वम् । असोरप्रशस्तादात्मनः प्रदेशादसुरानसृजत तदसुराणामसुरत्वम् ।
अथवा स्थानेषु सुष्ठु रतास्ते सुरताः सुराः । स्थानेषु चपलास्ते असुरताः असुराः ।
अथवा अस्ताः प्रच्याविताः स्थानेभ्यस्ते असुरा इति ।

† रक्ष्यतेऽस्मादिति रक्षस् एव राक्षसः स्वार्थेऽण् i. e. from whom it has to be protected. The etymologists take *havis*, an oblation, as the object of protection. But the meaning need not be so narrowed down to sacrificial offerings only; for it is the life of the Brahmin sacrificers, who were the spiritual guides of the Aryans, that was constantly in danger and needed protection against the Rakshasas,

weapons, the Aryan invaders succeeded in throwing their tenacious opponents backwards and backwards as far as the Narmadā valley.* But here at this time there arose fortunately among them a mighty leader, Tārakāsura by name, who effectively checked the rolling tide of Aryan advance. Taking advantage of the terrain, his able engineer, Mayāsura, is said to have built along the entire stretch of the river Narmadā three huge fortresses, of enormous length,†

* The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* says that Viṣṇu rose to the highest position among the gods on account of his bow and arrows : these were of divine origin, being produced from his left and right hand respectively. Though he was alone, yet his enemies could not overcome him in spite of their numbers; for he had the advantage of a bow, which they had not. It destroyed them at a distance; hence to them it was a miraculous missile. In World War I, when the German shells fell into Paris from over a distance of seventy-five miles, the Parisians for a time took the Germans to be genii and fell into a defeatist mood. In World War II, it was the possession of Atom bombs by the Allies which brought the truculent Japanese down to their knees in no time. The defeat of the numerous Asiatic armies by a handful of Europeans was mostly due to the superiority of artillery. Hence *Bhāravi* rightly observes that :—

अतः प्रकर्षाय विधिर्विधेयः प्रकर्षतन्त्रा हि रणे जयश्रीः। The *Kirāta* : III.

i. e. Hence every aspirant to victory must strive for superiority in weapons; for *God* is always on the side of superior weapons.

† The *Matsya Purāṇa* : Chapter CLXXXVII. The same chapter tells us that the mount Śrīśaila was formed on the spot where the first city fell and that the mount Amarakantaka sprang up on the spot where the second city fell. For further account of this decisive battle, see chapters CXXIX to CXXXI of this *Purāṇa*, and also the *Mahābhārata*, *Kaṇva Parva*, XXIV to XXVI.

with a triple enclosure wall, as massive as the spurs of a mountain, surrounded by deep ditches and hidden pits, and furnished with every device that science and ingenuity could supply. Having placed each of these three fortresses under the command of each of his three most valiant sons, Vidyunmālin, Tārāksha, and Tārakāksha, he established his headquarters at Tripurī, near Jubbulpore. So impregnable were the lines of fortifications constructed by Mayāsura that the Aryans simply dashed themselves to pieces against them. At last they called a halt and fell back. But Tārakāsura was not the man to leave them in peace. He took advantage of their drooping hearts, and lashed them with such fury and caused so much havoc among them that they were now afraid lest they should lose all that they had so far gained. Thereupon Śiva, the Lord of Kailāsa, came forward and rallied their scattered ranks; and having made tremendous preparations, he fell upon those terrible defensive works with such fire and determination that each fort was literally reduced to a heap of ashes and no trace of fortification was left anywhere.

For the destruction of Tripura, God Śiva is said to have used one arrow whose disastrous effect, as described in the Purāṇas, very closely resembles the terrific explosion of an Atom bomb, as seen at Hiroshima. To quote a few words from the Matsya Purāṇa, chapter 188:—

“The arrow produced a sudden blaze of fire which, spreading in all directions with shooting tongues of flames, gave a gory appearance to

the whole place. Houses and temples, palaces and towers, all crashed in a moment. Gardens and lakes, with flowers and fruits, with swans and cranes, all vanished out of sight. Storm and smoke added to the chaos. Men and women, beasts and birds, horses and cattle, boys and girls—all were unsparingly reduced to ashes, whether awake or asleep, sitting or standing, walking or running. Mothers giving suck to their babies, or holding them to their bosom, or fondling them on the lap, were all burnt down before they knew what the matter was. Blinded and suffocated, speechless and paralysed, wailing and groaning, people died by thousands”.

Hence is our Lord Śiva called Tripura-dahana, i. e. one who set Tripura ablaze.

In this battle of Tripurī, as bloody and decisive as Tālikot, Tārakāsura lost his three sons, his armies and generals, his armaments and treasures—practically everything. With a few remnants of his followers he escaped southwards; and although, making the Satpura range his stronghold, he continued his policy of harassment, yet he ceased to be a serious menace that he was before. His power was so thoroughly crippled that he was now like a lion with his fangs knocked out and his claws pared off; hence there arose a popular legend that even a child of seven days could now smash him. And he was smashed all right in his own den, when his annoyance grew intolerable. As the march of the punitive expedition fortuitously synchronised with the birth of a son to Lord Śiva, and as the final victory was achieved

on the seventh day, the Aryans attributed it to Kumāra in grateful remembrance of his Sire's past services to them at the most critical time, a time when their whole future trembled in the balance.*

The Non-Aryans were now finally thrown beyond the Satpura range into the wilderness of the Deccan or Dandaka. Mayāsura, the most ingenious designer, repaired to an unknown place in the sea to rebuild the shattered fortunes of his race.† But curiously enough, the Aryans, instead of pushing their advantage right up to the shores of the Indian ocean, themselves retired behind the Vindhya. And we might ask, why? The only possible answer seems to be that in these battles with Tāraksura, the Aryans had suffered so much, and so deeply were they impressed by the fierce valour of their antagonists, that they preferred to remain content with the region they had secured rather than seek further territorial extension. History furnishes several instance of this kind. Though the British, in the Second Afgan War, had fully avenged the massacre of the Khyber Pass, yet being convinced of the irrepressible bellicose

* This, in my opinion, is the rational explanation of the current myth that Tārakāsura was slain by the son of God Śiva on the seventh day of his birth. Poets like Kalidasa have no other explanation to offer except that being a child of divine parents, Kumāra grew to full manhood on the sixth day of his birth and led the heavenly host to victory on the following day. cf.

The *Kumāra* : XI. अलभत परां बुद्धिं षष्ठे दिने नवयौवनम् ।

स किल सकलं शास्त्रं शास्त्रं विवेद विभोरपि ॥

† The *Matsya Purāṇa* : 140. 75.

nature of the Afgans, they decided to remain content with the moral satisfaction of victory and, instead of pushing the Union Jack forward, as they had so far done after each decisive battle in India, they quietly retired behind the Hindu Kush and drew the line at Peshawar as the farthest limit of their empire in South Asia. So also our Aryan conquerors, instead of braving the terrors of jungle warfare against their inveterate foes, who though defeated were still unbroken in spirit, decided to seek peaceful safety behind the Maginot Line of the Vindhya. To this decision of theirs they gave the colour of a divine command that only the land between the Himalayas and the Vindhya, from the Eastern to the Western sea, was sacred and *that* alone was fit for Aryan habitation !*

Herein lies the starting point of Aryan downfall in India. In the Purāṇas what strikes our attention and provokes thought is the contrast that while the *Dāityas* are always shown practising severest penances to attain invincibility, the *Devas* are generally seen indulging in sensual habits owing to prosperity. Their time is mostly taken up with drunken revelry, shameless gallantry, society of nymphs, dancing parties, musical concerts. These are the ills of plethoric abundance, which few have been able to guard against and many have succumbed to in the past. As Ruskin says :—

* *Amara* : II. 1. आर्यावर्तः पुण्यभूमिर्मध्यं विन्ध्यहिमालयोः ।

Manu : II. 24. एतान् द्विजातयो देशान् संश्रयेरन् प्रयत्नतः ।

शूद्रस्तु यस्मिन् कस्मिन् वा निवसेद् वृत्तिकर्षितः ।

"What has been the source of the ruin of nations since the world began? Has it been plague or famine, earthquake shock or volcano flame? None of these calamities ever prevailed against a great people, so as to make their name pass from the earth. In every period and place of national decline, you will find other causes than these at work to bring it about, namely, luxury, effeminacy, love of pleasure, fineness in Art, ingenuity in enjoyment. What is the main lesson we gather from ancient history? Surely this--that simplicity of life, of language, and of manners gives strength to a nation; and that luxuriousness of life, subtlety of language, and smoothness of manners bring weakness and destruction on a nation. While men are scornful of all the arts of luxury and are in the sight of other nations as barbarians, their swords are irresistible and their sway illimitable; but let them become sensitive to the refinements of taste, and quick in the capacities of pleasure, and that instant the fingers that had grasped the iron rod fall from the golden sceptre. It is impossible to state the truth too strongly. For ever you will see the rude and simple nation at once more virtuous and more victorious than one practised in the arts. Watch how the Lydian is overthrown by the Persian; the Persian by the Athenian; the Athenian by the Spartan; then the whole of the polished Greece by the rougher Roman; the Roman, in his turn refined, only to be crushed by the Goth."*

* *Ruskin's Inaugural Address at the Cambridge School of Art, Oct. 1858.*

And our Aryans of old were no exception to the general rule. Enriched by the spoils of war, living on the fat of the land, and feeling secure against future aggression, they abandoned themselves to unrestrained pleasure. In consequence, weakness of nerve began to creep over them slowly and imperceptibly, but instead of shaking it off, they deceived themselves into a fool's paradise that if they left their defeated adversaries in undisturbed possession of southern wilderness, they would be left unmolested in their present state of blessedness. The result was that in course of time their adventurous spirit, their industrious habits, their indomitable will, which had so far characterised them, now began to ebb, so that by the time Rāvaṇa rose to power in the south, there was no will, no ability, no spirit left in the whole of Āryāvarta to oppose him.

Rāvaṇa was the last and by far the mightiest monarch among the Non-Aryans. So irresistible was his prowess that, in whichever direction he turned his face, he carried all before him; hence his figurative name *Daśamukha*.* He vowed bitter revenge upon the people of Āryāvarta, by whom his race had

* The poets and painters have taken *Daśamukha* actually to mean a monster with ten heads on his shoulders, though they refuse to take *Daśaratha* similarly to mean a petty chief having only ten chariots at his command. The reason for this inconsistency is obviously their prejudice against Rāvaṇa and partiality for the father of Rāma. The Sanskrit grammarians, however, rightly disallow the splitting of such names into their component parts and interpreting them literally.

been wronged in the past; and before his whirlwind tactics they proved no better than straw. Their kings had become so enfeebled by their love of luxurious ease and slothful contentment that, when he challenged them to open fight, they threw themselves flat on the face to effect a change of heart in him.* But the thick-headed Rāvaṇa was no respecter of these finer ways of spiritual conversion; unconcernedly he rode roughshod over them. The deplorable condition of Āryāvarta at this time has been portrayed in a single verse by Māgha as follows:—

‘Day and night did that mighty Rāvaṇa, after the commencement of hostilities with Indra, spread confusion worse confounded in the land of the gods, now storming their beautiful cities, now ravaging their smiling fields, now carrying off their richest treasures, now snatching away their loveliest damsels !’ †

Indeed, the moral and physical fibre of the Aryans was so undermined that instead of standing firmly together against the common danger to save their

* *Valmiki* : VII. 19.

समासाद्य तु राजेन्द्रान्महेन्द्रवरुणोपमान् ।
अब्रवीद्राक्षसेन्द्रस्तु युद्धं मे दीयतामिति ।
मन्त्रयित्वा ततोऽन्योऽन्यं राजानः सुमहाबलाः ।
दुष्कन्तः सुरथो गाधिर्गयो राजा पुरुरवाः ।
निर्जिताः स्मेत्यभाषन्त ज्ञात्वा वरबलं रिपोः ॥

† *Māgha* : I. 51.

पुरीमवस्कन्दं तुनीहि नन्दनं मुषाण रत्नानि हरामराङ्गनाः ।
विगृह्य चक्रे नमुचिद्विषा बली य इत्थमस्वास्थ्यमहर्दिवं दिवः ॥

honour, they all submitted one by one to these indignities to save their skin. Only one king, Anaranya of Ayodhyā, took the field against Rāvaṇa, but being isolated and fighting at a disadvantage, he was soon crushed. His prophetic words, uttered with the last flicker of his breath on the stricken field, are worth quoting :--

‘I am conquered, not by Rāvaṇa, but by a fateful turn of the wheel of Time. What a change has come upon us all ! Once invincible, now despicable, we all lie grovelling in the dust. However, let my body fall, perishable as it is, but the spirit that has animated it shall rise one day and so inspire a scion of my race that he will succeed where I have failed.’*

However, the future would show how far his confidence was justified. For the present the prostration of Āryāvarta was complete. The fate of the Aryan race, of Aryan culture and civilisation in India, was utterly dark ; for, the strength of character which is the very backbone of stability, prosperity, and progress was everywhere lacking. The glory of Rāma lies in this that he lifted the Aryan people of his time from the slough of despond into which they

* *Valmiki* : VII. 19.

न ह्यहं निर्जितो रक्षस्त्वया चात्मप्रशंसिना ।
 कालेनैव प्रपन्नो ऽहं हेतुभूतस्तु मे भवान् ।
 किं त्विदानीं मया शक्यं कर्तुं प्राणपरिक्षये ।
 न ह्यहं विमुखो रक्षो युध्यमानस्त्वया हतः ।
 यदि दत्तं यदि द्रुतं यदि मे सुकृतं तपः ।
 उत्पत्स्यते कुले ह्यस्मिन्त्यस्ते प्राणान्हरिष्यति ॥

had fallen. He awakened self-consciousness in them; he strengthened their will-power and infused new life into their drooping souls. He did this, not by precept, but by example. He broke down for good the Non-Aryan menace in India and installed *love of humanity* in place of *worship of brute force*. He cleared the way for the spread of vedic ideals of life from the Vindhyas downwards to the shores of the Indian Ocean and beyond it.

The *Adhyātma* and the *Rāma-charita-mānasa* both lay great stress on the profound love and admiration which God Śiva has for Rāma. Tulasidāsa describes the raptures of joy which the Lord of Kailāsa felt at the birth of Rāma, at his boyhood sports, at his woodland experiences, and at his signal victory.* What can be the explanation of this attachment which the one has for the other? To my mind it seems that since Lord Śiva by his conquest of Tripura had stabilised Aryan advance upto the Vindhyas, and since Lord Rāma by his conquest of Laṅkā brought it to the southernmost extremity of India, the spirit of the former has been poetically conceived as watching with supreme satisfaction from heaven the triumphant career of the latter on earth and as thrilling with ecstasies at the completion of the

* *Tulasi* : Bālkapaḍa :

अउरउ एक कहउँ निज चोरी । सुनु गिरिजा अतिदृढ मति तोरी ॥
 काकभुसुंडि संग हम दोऊ । मनुजरूप जानइ नहिं कोऊ ॥
 परमानंद प्रेम-सुख-फूले । वीथिन्ह फिरहिं मगन मन भूले ॥
 यह सुभ चरित जान पै सोई । कृपा राम कै जापर होई ॥

great work of Aryan expansion and conquest, which Indra had started in the beginning, which Upendra had carried forward after him, which Śiva had saved from collapse in the nick of time, and which Rāma brought to a finish so well that thereafter the *Devadānava-struggle* was no more heard of. In other words, there was none left after Rāvaṇa to dispute the Aryan occupation of India. The superiority of Rāma over his predecessors lay in this that he achieved his goal more by tactful conciliation and amiable ways than by bumptious dictation and sudden ultimatums. His alliance with Sugrīva and Vibhīṣaṇa was a masterly stroke of genius. By winning them over to his side and putting them in authority over their respective peoples he brought about gradually the conversion of South India to his Faith. By his life of self-denial he impressed upon his own people that man was born for duty, not for pleasure, and that man fulfilled himself best when he lived mostly for others. This is the lesson we ought to learn from God's incarnating himself from time to time—to fulfill Himself in many a way and not to give way to the lusts of the flesh.

CHAPTER III

The Stage is Set

How did Rāma set about his arduous task ? From his early boyhood he had witnessed the demoralisation of his race, and his heart was deeply stirred with a feeling that his true mission in life was not to vegetate on the banks of the Sarayū, but to liberate the land of his forefathers from the crushing tyranny of the Rākshasas in general and of Rāvaṇa in particular. The extent to which the Kshatriyas of his time had fallen in spirit can well be judged from the fact that when one Rākshasa woman, Tāḍakā by name, ran amok—killing, hacking, and molesting people at will, none dared to stay her hand : they all stood quaking in their shoes, or rather trusted to their heels at her approach, like so many rustics before a drunken Tommy of old. When the great sage Viśwāmitra complained to King Daśaratha about her and her brood, and prayed for deliverance from her wanton outrage, the king ruefully admitted his utter helplessness in this matter; for, he said, if he took any step against her and her sons, he would directly get into a scrape with Rāvaṇa whose secret support they possibly had, and Rāvaṇa was a rough customer to deal with, whom he shuddered to meet. His son Rāma, a mere stripling and hence inexperienced, might in a fit of impetuous folly

volunteer his services, but he could never allow him to do an act which entailed risk to himself and threatened ruin to the whole family.*

Such was the prevailing atmosphere of his time ! The Kshatriyas had developed inferiority complex, and the Rākshasas taking full advantage of it waxed more and more oppressive each day. It must therefore be ever remembered to the credit of Rāma that though he was not yet turned sixteen, he saw aright that the root of the enemy's invincibility lay in one's own imbecility. To call oneself a Kshatriya, a Redresser of wrongs, and not to respond to the call for help even at the peril of one's life was to belie one's own name†. His father's caution seemed to him little short of cowardice, and his spirit rebelled against it. Without wasting his breath in argument he left the palace with Lakshmaṇa and followed the

* *Vālmiki*: I. 20. मारीचश्च सुबाहुश्च रावणेन प्रचोदितौ ।
यज्ञस्य विघ्नकर्तारौ राक्षसौ च महाबलौ ।
स तु वीर्यवतां वीर्यमादत्ते युधि रावणः ।
तेन चाहं न शक्तोऽस्मि संयोधुं तस्य वा बलैः ।
ऊनषोडशवर्षो मे रामो राजीवलोचनः ।
न युद्धयोग्यतामस्य पश्यामि सह राक्षसैः ॥

† *Kālidāsa*: II.

क्षतात् किल त्रायत इत्युदग्रः
क्षत्रस्य शब्दो भुवनेषु रूढः ।
राज्येन किं तद्विपरीतवृत्तेः
प्राणैरुपक्रोशमलीमसैर्वा ॥

i. e. of what use is kingdom, or even life stained by ignominy, to him whose conduct is contrary to heroic spirit,

sage to his hermitage.* Viśwāmitra was a warrior turned a saint, hence he was an excellent guide in offensive and defensive tactics. In fact Rāma made a beginning in military science with him. Under his directions the attack on Tāḍakā's stronghold was so thoroughly planned and so well executed that, taken unawares, few escaped. What was once a dreaded donjon became over night a charnel dungeon. 'Don't hit unless you mean to hit hard,' is a golden rule whose value can never be exaggerated, and this rule Rāma practised to utmost perfection throughout his career.

Out of the whole lot that was rounded up and mercilessly put to death, Mārīcha alone could escape, and he escaped by the skin of his teeth. Unnerved at the appalling slaughter of his kindred, he fled straight to the island of Laṅkā. The arrow of Rāma, says Vālmīki, sent him flying head-over-heels some hundreds of miles away to the sea.† What can be

* The region infested by Tāḍakā and her notorious gang was to the south of the junction of the Gogra and the Ganges, i. e. at a distance of more than a hundred and seventy miles from the city of Ayodhyā. The hermitage of Viśwāmitra was situated just below it on the site of the modern town of Buxar. Thus from the junction of the two rivers Viśwāmitra and his party had to make a journey of nearly forty miles in a retrograde direction from east to west along the southern bank of the Ganges. It is this part of the journey, which, according to the Rāmāyana, occupied two days. See the Map.

† *Vālmīki* : I. 30. स तेन परमास्त्रेण मानवेन समाहतः ।
 संपूर्णं योजनशतं क्षिप्तः सागरसंग्रहे ।
 विचेतनं विघूर्णन्तं शीतेषु बलपीडितम् ।
 निरस्तं दृश्य मारीचं रामो लक्ष्मणमब्रवीत् ॥

the meaning of this figurative expression? To my mind *the arrow of Rāma* here signifies the change from defeatist mentality to pugnacious tendency, which suddenly manifested itself among the Aryans through Rāma. In this radical change of attitude Mārīcha, a shrewd person, saw a grave danger to his race. He therefore went post-haste to the capital of Rāvāna and informed him of the dawn of a new era in Āryāvarta. He did not advocate repressive measures against the Aryans; on the contrary he urged him to recognise their right of honourable existence. No one, however mighty, said he, could ever thrive on hostile relations with his neighbours; for hate begot hate, made each a veritable brute, and led both to utter destruction. Hence unless he gave up his present policy of highhandedness and restrained his own people from committing excesses in his name, the days of his empire were numbered.*

Rāvāna must have seen the force of this reasoning; for he admitted Mārīcha thereafter to his Inner Cabinet as a counsellor. But having been long accustomed to treat the Aryans with contempt as his inferiors, to treat them now with honour as his equals went against the grain. He could not bend, and a break-down did not seem likely to him. Still

* *Vālmiki* : III. 41.

न चातिप्रतिकूलेन नाविनीतेन राक्षस ।
 राज्यं पालयितुं शक्यं न तीक्ष्णेन निशाचर ।
 अवश्यं विनशिष्यन्ति सर्वे रावण राक्षसाः ।
 येषां त्वं कर्कशो राजा दुर्बुद्धिरजितेन्द्रियः ॥

as a precautionary measure, he started strengthening and garrisoning the defences of his empire which was bounded in the north by the river Godāvarī. He established military outposts beyond this line, as far as the Narmadā, through the hilly and forest region known as Dandakā, a no-man's-land. His idea seems to be that in case there was an uprising in Āryāvarta, he must be forewarned and be in a position to smash it down with one mighty blow. These outposts extended their operations as far to the northward as the right bank of the Jumna and the Ganges, and were a source of annoyance to the Brahmanical hermitages which lay scattered to the south of these two rivers as far downwards as the river Godāvarī. It is indeed significant that when Rāma came to stay at Chitrakūta, the hermits dwelling there quitted the place through fear lest his presence among them should bring them into serious trouble with the Rākshasas.* However, the point is

* *Valmiki* : II. 116.

ये तत्र चित्रकूटस्य पुरस्तात्तापसाश्रमे ।
 नयनैर्भृकुटीभिश्च रामं निर्दिश्य शंकिताः ।
 अथर्षिर्जरया वृद्धो रामं प्रोवाच सादरम् ।
 रावणावरजः कश्चित्खरो नामेह राक्षसः ।
 अवलिप्तश्च पापश्च त्वां च तात न मृष्यते ।
 सकलत्रस्य संदेहो नित्यं युक्तस्य राघव ।
 समर्थस्यापि सहितो वासो दुःखमिहाद्य ते ।
 इत्युक्त्वा ह्याश्रमं त्यक्त्वा स जगाम कुलैः सह ॥

that though Rāvaṇa recognised the genius of Mārīcha, his nature acted contrary to his profound advice.* Thereafter Mārīcha took no further interest in the doings of his master. He let him have his own way without opposition. In fact, he turned a recluse and lived almost in solitude. But when Rāvaṇa towards the end sought his active help in carrying off Sītā trickily, he gave him a bit of his mind and again warned him in clear terms that the step he had decided upon was not only disgraceful but might prove

(Continued from the previous page)

i. e. The hermits at Chitrakūṭa, becoming nervous, looked askance at Rāma and indicated by their frowns that he was the cause of their misgivings. Then their spokesman said to Rāma, ' The demon Khara, younger brother of Rāvapa, is nearby. He is too haughty and wicked to forget the old grudge he bears you for the destruction of Tāḍakā. Besides, your stay among us with your wife will itself invite mischief from the Rakshasas. We do not doubt your ability to cope with any situation, but we rather think it safe to be out of this danger zone '. With these words he and his fellow hermits left the place.

* The *Gītā* : III.

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि ।

प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥

i. e. Even a man of knowledge cannot help acting in conformity with his own nature. Creatures as a rule follow their natural tendencies, against which external checks are of little avail.

suicidal in the long run.* But egged on by his sister and thirsting for revenge, Rāvaṇa flouted the warning and demanded his assistance on pain of death. Mārīcha had to obey, reluctantly though, but he obeyed to the best of his ability. He did not spare himself. He brought all his ingenuity to bear on the task assigned to him and helped his lord on to his coveted object at the cost of his own dear life. In this way Rāvaṇa lost the one sound man he had, farsighted and able, who always wished him well, who remained true to the salt in spite of snub and rebuff, who did not go over to the enemy, as Vibhīṣhaṇa did, for life or lucre. He had started as a persecutor, but he ended as a prophet. Let us shed a few tears for him and go back to the point wherefrom we digressed.

When Tāḍakā and her gang were wiped out at one stroke, the people heaved a sigh of relief, but

* *Vālmīki* : III. 39.

रणे रामेण युध्यस्व क्षमां वा कुरु रावण ।
 किं तु दारापहारस्ते सर्वथा नोचितो भवेत् ।
 आनयिष्यसि चेत्सीतामाश्रमात्सहितो मया ।
 नैव त्वमपि नाहं वै नैव लंका न राक्षसाः ॥

i. e. you may either challenge him openly to a mortal combat or forgive him mercifully for the wrong he has done your sister. But to carry off his wife stealthily is an act so cowardly and mean that it will surely bring down your prestige in the world; and once the prestige is gone, the empire will soon follow suit. I again warn you that if you kidnap his wife with my help from his cottage, you will be simply playing into his hands. And then neither I shall be alive, nor you will be safe, nor Lāṅkā will remain intact, nor the Rakshasas will survive as a proud race.

the Kshatriyas must have felt panicky about it; for, to judge from the words of Daśaratha, they were all apprehensive of dire consequences to themselves from such a step. Hence they must have waited with bated breath for the worst. But no thunderstorm burst upon them from the south. The daredevilry of Rāma turned out to be a well-judged action. Rāma had correctly guessed that Rāvaṇa would never care to raise a finger in behalf of a few ruffians who treated murder and arson as lively sport, and thus were a disgrace to any society, whether black or white. His guess was confirmed by the result. But what use did he make of his experience, of his success in the first brush with the Rākshasas ? He is said to have returned to Ayodhyā as a married man and to have lived there for full twelve years before going into exile.* How did he spend this time ? Vālmīki is altogether silent on this point, or rather the later rhapsodists who made

* *Vālmīki* : III. 47.

सीता नाम्नास्मि भद्रं ते रामस्य महिषी प्रिया ।
उषित्वा द्वादश समा इक्ष्वाकूणां निवेशने ।
तत्र त्रयोदशे वर्षे राजामन्त्रयत प्रभुः ।
अभिषेचयितुं रामं समेतो राजमन्त्रिभिः ॥

This statement of Sita's that she lived with Rāma for twelve years in Ayodhyā after her marriage is further corroborated by the *Padma Purāṇa* :—

तत्र द्वादश वर्षाणि राघवः सह सीतया ।
रमयामास धर्मात्मा नारायण इव श्रिया ।
तस्मिन्काले महाराजः प्रीतो रामस्य सद्गुणैः ।
ज्येष्ठं राज्येन संयोजतुमैच्छत्सर्वनृपाञ्जया ॥

drastic changes in his poem have expunged this particular portion as unsuitable to the divine character of Rāma. The subsequent classical and vernacular poets describe with gusto the various amorous pleasures which Rāma enjoyed with Sītā in the inner apartment during this period, a description which is rather a reflection of their own voluptuous nature than a correct appreciation of Rāma's personality. The Western scholars express a significant surprise at the fact that Sītā should have no issue during the first twelve years of happy home life, nor any during the next thirteen and a half years of free forest life, though she was constantly with Rāma, and that she should be reported to be in the family way soon after her deliverance from the hands of Rāvaṇa! Obviously they hint that Rāma was possibly unsexed and Sītā very likely unchaste. In this way they seek to account for the extreme harshness of Rāma, as a jealous husband, in turning Sītā out of doors in spite of her being helplessly, or why, because of her being unexpectedly, in a delicate state.*

My reading of Rāma's character is entirely different from either. As I have already said before, from the very dawn of consciousness in him he was inspired with the idea that he was born for a great purpose; hence until the main purpose of his life was achieved, his mind remained altogether detached from the pleasures of sense. All his energies were,

* Talboys Wheeler: History of India, Vol. II, Part V, Chapter XIV.

as it were, sublimated into one spiritual force. It is this which made him a superman and brought him a unique triumph in the end. I therefore hold firmly to the view that when he returned to Ayodhyā after completing his course of training under Viśwāmitra* and thereafter winning the hand of Sītā at Mithilā, he did not sit idle, immersed in the joys of the harem, but spent the whole of his time in acquainting himself personally with the moral and political atmosphere of Āryāvarta and in devising his plans for the future according to his knowledge of the present. He must have visited the Kshatriya princes of his time and striven hard to bring them round to his point of view that if they all combined under one leadership, the myth of Rāvaṇa's invincibility would be exploded in a moment and the problem of Āryāvarta solved for ever. But, as the future developments show, he did not meet with any success worth the name. The dread of Rāvaṇa had gone so deep into them that their hearts would not rise in response to his call for united action. Such has been the fate of several heroes in India. The case of Anarāyaṇa, who braved the might of Rāvaṇa alone and fought to the death, has already been mentioned before. Rāṇā

* According to Vālmiki, Rāma was twenty-five at the time of his marriage. He is said to have left Ayodhyā with Viśvāmitra before he was sixteen. The difference is the period of his training. Sītā says to Rāvaṇa that her husband, of great prowess, was twenty-five at the time of her marriage and that she was eighteen :—

III. 47. मम भर्ता महातेजा वयसा पंचविंशकः ।
अष्टादश हि वर्षाणि मम जन्मनि गण्यते ॥

Pratāp is another case in point. Rānī Lakshmībāī stood a solitary figure in her war for independence; hence Sir Hugh Rose wrote in his Diary that 1857 produced only one man in India and that man was a woman—the Rānī of Jhansi! As regards Śivāji, he had no help from the Mahratta sardars of his time: they all scoffed at his ambition of winning political freedom for Mahārāshṭra. He had, therefore, to forge ahead with a band of mountaineers from the Western Ghats. Our Rāma, too, saw that there was no other course for him but to get away first from the discouraging atmosphere of Āryāvarta and then work for its salvation from within the hostile territory itself. Naturally he had to proceed so guardedly that the enemy should remain off his guard while the mine was being well and truly laid under his feet, and not wake up to a sense of reality until the time was ripe for the final explosion.

But how to escape from Ayodhyā was a problem which weighed heavily upon his mind. Daśaratha had begun to feel the effects of old age and needed rest from the more active duties of Government. His prospective co-adjutor in day to day administration was evidently Rāma, as he was the eldest son and already past his majority. His formal installation in the regal office seemed therefore imminent. This was, ordinarily speaking, a matter for hilarity to Rāma; but it caused him, on the contrary, deep anxiety. His soul cried from within that he must make haste to get away from home before the chains of royalty fettered him to the throne. This fact has

been allegorically described in the *Adhyātma* as follows: —*

‘When the talk of Rāma’s inauguration to heir-apparentcy was in the air, Nārada one day came from heaven in a hurry and saw him in private. He reminded him that the gods had sent him to the earth to be the saviour of all humanity and not to rule the destinies of a small principality. He must therefore make haste to get out of the rut before it was too late. Rāma thereupon assured him that he was fully alive to the urgency of the task before him, but he would rather sit still for a while than make a stir prematurely. As far as he saw, the Fates had already begun to work in his behalf and so to shape the future course of events that his departure from the kingdom must follow as a matter of course. He would therefore wait patiently, keep his eyes open, and seize the right moment to say good-bye to Ayodhyā’.

And so it happened. Indeed, so curious was the web woven by Destiny that the very persons who should have blocked his way, themselves made his exit inevitable.

* *The Adhyātma*: II. 1.

रावणस्य वधार्थाय जातोऽसि रघुनन्दन ।
यदि राज्याभिसंसक्तो रावणं न हनिष्यसि ।
प्रतिज्ञा ते कृता राम भूभारहरणाय वै ।
राम उवाच । शृणु नारद मे किंचिद् विद्यतेऽविदितं क्वचित् ।
प्रतिज्ञातं च यत्पूर्वं करिष्ये तन्न संशयः ।
किं तु कालानुरोधेन तत्तत्प्रारब्धसंश्रयात् ।
हरिष्ये सर्वभूभारं क्रमेणासुरमण्डलम् ॥

They say that Kaikeyī was the youngest and fairest wife of Daśaratha. Fascinated by her charms, he had solicited her hand at a fairly advanced age, though he had already two wives still alive and in the prime of life. Her father, King of Kekaya, had accepted his proposal only on two conditions:— firstly, the right of succession to the throne must descend to her son, whatever the law of the country or the tradition of the family might say on the point; secondly, if any or both of his first two queens attained to motherhood hereafter, whichever was the legal heir should be publicly disinherited. The agreement involved sheer injustice to Kausalyā in case she happened to give birth to a son, and to Sumitrā in case the former remained childless and the latter alone was blessed. But Daśaratha made it for the sake of Kaikeyī. She was a woman of ravishing beauty, and he a man of voluptuous tendency.* Blinded by carnal passion, he had little thought for cardinal justice; hence though the proposed terms were unfair and humiliating to his first

* Even Sītā lays stress on this very trait of Daśaratha's character, when she accounts for her husband's exile to the forest. In *Valmiki* : III. 47. she says:—

कामार्तश्च महाराजः पिता दशरथः स्वयम् ।

कैकेय्याः प्रियकामार्थं तं रामं नाभ्यषेचयत् ॥

i. e. the royal sire Daśaratha was so smitten with lust that to win a gracious smile from Kaikeyī he called off the installation of Rāma.

Valmiki uses a still stronger expression in II. 11. He says:—

तं मन्मथशरैर्विद्धं कामवेगवशानुगम् ।

उवाच पृथिवीपालं कैकेयी दारुणं वचः ॥

This was the state of Daśaratha's mind just a few hours before his son's installation. We rather expect an aged father to be conjuring up sweet images of his son's future than reveling in thoughts of his own lustful pleasure !

two wives, he accepted them readily without reservation. This fact is the real nucleus of the subsequent tragedy. The later classical and vernacular poets have entirely suppressed it, as it reflects discredit on the father of Rāma, and twisted the narrative a good deal to account somehow for the unpleasant developments that followed. But in trying to shield Daśaratha from the charge of grave injustice, they have themselves done great injustice to the mother of Bharata. They have thrown the entire blame upon her head and painted her a beautiful white Devil, red in tooth and claw.

In Vālmiki, too, there is only a passing reference to this marriage agreement. It occurs in the confidential talk which Rāma had with Bharata at Chitrakūṭa in order to reclaim his mind from the bitter prejudice he had against his own mother. He consoles him thus:—

“Listen, O Brother, to what actually happened a long time ago. When our Sire married your mother, he made a solemn declaration to your maternal grandfather that his entire realm was a bridal present to her.”*

* Vālmiki:II. 107. पुरा भ्रातः पिता नः स मातरं ते समुद्रहन् ।

मातामहे समाश्रौषीद्राज्यशुल्कमनुत्तमम् ॥

C. V. Vaidya is of opinion that this was an *Asura-vivāha*, in which the greed of the bride's father has to be gratified with a substantial gift of wealth. But since the kingdom of Kośala was not to be the property of the lord of Kekaya, but the inheritance of Kaikeyi's son, I reject his view and agree with the Tilaka commentary which interprets the above verse as follows:—

तव पुत्र्यां यो जनिष्यते तस्मै राज्यं प्रदास्यामीति प्रतिज्ञातवान् इत्यर्थः ।

i. e. He solemnly promised thus, “I shall give my kingdom only to that son who will be born of your daughter.”

The reference is highly important. It is a clue to the mysterious proceedings of Daśaratha before Rāma's installation. Vālmīki must have treated this matter at length and in its right place. But when his Epic fell into the hands of his successors, they dropped the whole portion as unsuitable to their design and substituted instead a story of the two boons. The story runs briefly as follows:—*

“Once upon a time, while fighting with the demons, Daśaratha was mortally wounded. As he lay unconscious and almost on the verge of death, his wife Kaikeyī came to his rescue, braving the dangers of the battle-field. She administered him the first aid, carried him to a place of safety, and gradually brought him round. But there also came the demons hunting after him. She concealed him quickly from their view and sent them away on the wrong scent. In this way Daśaratha owed his life to her twice. Therefore out of gratitude to her for her timely help and presence of mind, Daśaratha promised her the fulfilment of any two wishes of hers in future.”

This is that story, simple and believable, but a little too prosaic for the taste of later poets, who

* Vālmīki: II. 9.

तत्राकरोन्महायुद्धं राजा दशरथस्तदा ।
 असुरैश्च महाबाहुः शस्त्रैश्च विकलीकृतः ।
 अपवाह्य त्वया देवि संग्रामान्नष्टचेतनः ।
 तत्रापि विक्षतः शस्त्रैः पतिस्ते रक्षितस्त्वया
 तुष्टेन तेन दत्तौ ते द्वौ वरौ शुभदर्शने ॥

are never satisfied with anything unless it is clothed in *thunder and lightning*. There were also other reasons for their dissatisfaction with this story. In the first instance, they felt that to represent Daśa-ratha as worsted by the ungodly host was an insult to his dignity as the godly father of Rāma; in the second instance, they argued that the award of a 'blank cheque' to the youngest wife could hardly be excusable in a wise king, unless the act so rewarded was shown to be of transcendental nature. Therefore they changed Kaikeyī's simple act of nursing to a feat of superhuman endurance. Their revised story runs thus:—*

"In the thick of the fight, as Daśaratha's chariot pressed forward, crushing the demons underneath, one of the axle-pins flew off, leaving the wheel in a precarious condition. Kaikeyī who was sitting close by saw the danger ahead. It was a critical moment. There was no time to lose. She thrust her hand out, put the forefinger into the pin-hole, and kept the wheel spinning as before. In this way the threatened break-down was averted and the doubtful victory ensured. Daśaratha owed his triumph to her resourcefulness; therefore out of gratitude he granted her the choice of

* This is the most popular legend, originating from the

Adhyātma : II. 2. युद्धं प्रकुर्वतस्तस्य राक्षसैः सह धन्विनः ।
 तदाक्षकीलो न्यपतच्छिन्नस्तस्य न वेद सः ।
 त्वं तु हस्तं समावेद्य कीलरन्ध्रे ऽ तिधीरतः ।
 स्थितवत्यसितापाङ्गि पतिप्राणपरीप्सया ।
 वरद्वयं वृणीष्व त्वमेवं राजा ऽ वदत्स्वयम् ॥

two boons, which she might ask of him at any time in her life."

This is that story. It makes a heavy demand upon our credulity and may be dismissed as a fantasy. To the devout, of course, nothing is incredible and they cling to it as a fact. How Kaikeyī, sitting inside the chariot, could reach her hand out to the axle, and get to the pin-hole without putting it through the spokes, and yet keep the wheel in a whirl, and make her feminine finger hard as steel, are questions which never enter their mind. All is grist to the mill and nothing is indigestible to faith.

However, after this third marriage, as Providence would have it, the three queens gave birth to four sons in all at short intervals. That they were all brought to bed on the same day and in the same hour seems to me a purposeful exaggeration. It is obviously meant to give a miraculous touch to the birth of the four brothers who lived at peace and worked in unison as parts of one body. They are therefore poetically conceived as the four portions of God Vishṇu himself. This is, of course, the later poets' idea incorporated in Vālmīki's epic in the course of its expansion.* The Padma-Purāṇa, however, makes

* *Vālmīki* : I. 18.

कौसल्याऽजनयद् रामं दिव्यलक्षणसंयुतम् ।

विष्णोरर्धं महाभागम् ।

भरतो नाम कैकेय्यां जज्ञे सत्यपराक्रमः ।

साक्षाद्विष्णोश्चतुर्भागः ।

अथ लक्ष्मणशत्रुघ्नौ सुमित्राऽजनयत्सुतौ ।

विष्णोरर्धसमायुक्तौ ।

Rāma the full incarnation of Vishṇu, and the other three sons—Bharata, Lakshmaṇa, and Śatrughna—the incarnations of the *Conch*, the *Cobra*, and the *Disc* respectively, these three being the necessary accompaniments of God Vishṇu. The same Purāṇa also says that the birth of these three did not take place on the same day with Rāma, but on two successive days after Rāma.* The *Adhyātma* follows *Vālmiki* in taking the birth of all to be simultaneous with Rāma's, but sides with the *Padma* in identifying his three brothers with the three inseparable objects of God Vishṇu. As regards the interesting question, which two were the twins, opinions differ. The Marathi poets take Bharata and Śatrughna to be the twin-sons of Kaikeyī; because both were hand and glove with each other; both lived together for a long time in Kekaya; and both ruled together in Ayodhyā after the departure of Rāma to the forest. Indeed, the Rāmāyaṇa has no incident to report in which Śatrughna was ever seen with Lakshmaṇa. The view of the Marathi poets gains further support from the set order in which the four names are pronounced—*Rāma*, *Lakshmaṇa*, *Bharata* and *Śatrughna*. The Sankrit writers, on the contrary, whether

* The *Padma* :—

अन्येद्युः पाञ्चजन्यात्मा कैकेय्यां भरतोऽभवत् ।

तदन्येद्युः सुमित्रायाम् अनन्तात्मा च लक्ष्मणः ।

सुदर्शनात्मा शत्रुघ्नो द्वौ जातौ युगपत्प्रिये ॥

पाञ्चजन्य = शंख; अनन्त = शेष; सुदर्शन = चक्र । अन्येद्युः = on the next day. तदन्येद्युः = on the day following that.

paurāṇic or classical, take Lakshmaṇa and Śatrughna to be the twin-sons of Sumitrā, and give mystical reasons for the two pairs in which the four brothers divided themselves. Some say that since *Vishṇu* sleeps on the *Cobra* and is therefore closely associated with him, *Rāma* and *Lakshmaṇa* always kept together; and since the *Conch* and the *Disc* are complementary weapons and therefore necessarily together in war, *Bharata* and *Śatrughna* always went hand in hand. Others point their finger at the peculiar distribution of the sacrificial oblation which was meant to ensure pregnancy in the three queens. Daśaratha had at first divided it into two equal halves, giving one to Kausalyā, because she was the eldest, and the other to Kaikeyī, as she was the dearest. These two afterwards gave compassionately a portion out of their own share to Sumitrā, who thus had Lakshmaṇa and Śatrughna as twins, but one naturally leaning towards the son of Kausalyā, the other towards the son of Kaikeyī.* Bhavabhūti's explanation is briefest and best. He says† :—

* *The Padma*:— युगं बभूवतुस्तत्र सुस्निग्धौ रामलक्ष्मणौ ।
तथा भरतशत्रुघ्नौ पायसांशवशात्स्वतः ॥

i. e. It was owing to the peculiar distribution of the sacrificial oblation that Rāma & Lakshmaṇa formed one affectionate pair, and Bharata and Śatrughna formed the other pair.

† *The Uttaracharita* : VI.

व्यतिषजति पदार्थान् आन्तरः कोऽपि हेतु-
र्न खलु बहिरुपाधीन् प्रीतयः संश्रयन्ते ।
विकसति हि पतंगस्योदये पुंडरीकं
द्रवति च हिमरश्मावुद्गते चन्द्रकान्तः ॥

“Some mysterious force working internally draws things together. Affections do not certainly rest on adventitious causes. Who can tell why the lotus should bloom at the rise of the sun and the lunar gem ooze at the snowy-rayed moon?”

Indeed, who ?

And who can explain Daśaratha's peculiar attachment to Rāma ? He had almost despaired of even one son. He was blessed with four, and they were all healthy, strong, bright, and handsome. All were dear to him naturally, but dearest among them was Rāma. Considering his extreme coldness towards Kausalyā,* his excessive affection for Rāma was a strange phenomenon. The poets have no other way to account for it except by tracing it to their relations in previous birth.† That may be so. But

* This important point has been entirely suppressed by the later poets. Vālmiki makes no secret of it and puts the following words in the mouth of Kausalyā : *Vālmiki* : II. 20 :—

अत्यन्तं निगृहीतास्मि भर्तुर्नित्यमसंमता ।

न दृष्टपूर्वं कल्याणं सुखं वा पतिपौखे ॥

The Tilak.—पत्युरनुरागकृतं रंजनं तत्र प्राप्यं वस्त्रालंकारभोगादिकं सुखं न मया दृष्टपूर्वमित्यर्थः ।

i. e. Having not a trace of liberty in the palace, I have been throughout shivering under the cold looks of my husband. Indeed, that happiness which marital affection alone can ensure has been entirely denied to me.

† *The Adhyātma* : I. 2.

कश्यपस्य वरो दत्तस्तपसा तोषितेन मे ।

याचितः पुत्रभावाय तथेत्यंगीकृतं मया ।

स इदानीं दशरथो भूत्वा तिष्ठति भूतले ॥

here we are concerned only with the facts of this life, and the curious fact was that Daśaratha's heart swelled most at the sight of Rāma only. But the unique joy that he felt carried with it the sharp prick of one anxiety. And that anxiety was* :—

“How shall I during my lifetime see my dear Rāma installed as Crown Prince !”

This should make us pause. His anxiety was, to all appearances, out of place. Rāma was unquestionably senior to his brothers in age, and he stood head and shoulders above them in every other respect. He had already endeared himself to the people by his strength of mind, largeness of heart, and pleasing ways.† Thus law, tradition, and public support were decidedly on his side. His priority of claim to the throne was, therefore, not in the least in doubt. And yet Daśaratha's mind misgave him. This is certainly inexplicable, unless we connect his misgiving with the condition on which he had married his youngest wife. That condition he could never forget, and it preyed upon his mind day and night. His word of honour was pledged with the lord of Kekaya, and he must keep it as an honourable man, at least to avoid rupture between the two kingdoms. But he had

* *Vālmiki* : II. 1. ततो दशरथो राजा चक्रे चिन्तां परंतपः ।
प्रीतिरेषा कथं रामो राजा स्यान्मयि जीवति ॥

† *Ibid* : II. 1. वीर्यवान् विजितक्रोधो बुद्धिमांश्च प्रियंवदः ।
अनुरक्तः प्रजाभिश्च प्रजाश्चाप्यनुरज्यते ॥

not the heart to deny the crown publicly to one who deserved it most by right of birth as also of worth; nor had he the courage to put it squarely on his head while Bharata stood by before the eyes of Kaikeyī. How, then, to avoid doing injustice to Rāma and yet lay not himself open to blame from the lord of Kekaya was the perplexing problem before him. At long last he decided upon a course which he believed would carry him safely to his destination. But Destiny willed otherwise. In steering away from the rock, he lost his bearings and ran directly into the whirlpool which engulfed him completely.

What was his plan? He sent away Bharata to Kekaya, ostensibly at the request of his maternal uncle,* to pass a few days with his old grandfather at Girivraja, his capital.† This visit of Bharata to his grandfather's place could not have taken place, as the Rāmāyaṇa in its present form seems to say, immediately after his return from Mithilā where all the four brothers were married simultaneously; for he is said to have come back from Kekaya only after the tragic death of Daśaratha, and this event, according to the words of Sītā quoted before, happened in the thirteenth year after her marriage. It is inconceivable that Bharata stayed away from his

* *Vālmiki* : I. 77.

भरतं कैकयीपुत्रं राजा दशरथोऽब्रवीत् ।
त्वां नेतुमागतो वीरो युधाजिन्मातुलस्तव ॥

† *Ibid* : I. 73.

स्वस्तीयं मम राजेन्द्र द्रष्टुकामो महीपतिः ।
तदर्थमुपयातोऽहमयोध्यां रघुनन्दन ॥

father, his mother, and his newly married wife for twelve years at a stretch and with no other purpose but to enjoy sumptuous hospitality at his uncle's place. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Bharata's visit to Girivraja took place in the thirteenth year after his marriage and just a few months before the banishment of Rāma. This supposition accords well with the following statement in *Vālmiki** :—

“All the daughters-in-law were delighted at heart on arriving at their new home and lived thereafter with their husbands in conjugal bliss. And the sons, too, passed their days happily, serving their father with respectful attention.”

These lines further prove that Sītā and her three sisters had attained to puberty at the time of their nuptials and were not only six years old, as some orthodox writers are at pains to make out in defence of child-marriage.† If the orthodox view is accepted,

* *Vālmiki* : I. 77.

अभिवाद्याभिवाद्यांश्च सर्वा राजसुतास्तदा ।

रेमिरे मुदिताः सर्वा भर्तृभिर्मुदिता रहः ।

शुश्रूषमाणाः पितरं वर्तयन्ति नरर्षभाः ॥

† Sītā's words, quoted before, that she was 18 and Rāma was 25, are taken by many to mean that these were their ages at the time of going into exile. But since both had lived together in Ayodhya for full twelve years after their marriage, this would make Sītā to be 6 and Rāma 13 at the time of their marriage. But how could Rāma be 13 at the time of his marriage, when he had left for the hermitage of Viśvāmitra at the age of 16 ? And how could a kiddy of 6 ever enjoy erotic pleasures with a boy of 13 ?

the actual words of Vālmīki, *then the newly married couples sported delightfully in the privacy of their bed-chambers* will make sheer nonsense.

However, after the departure of Bharata from Ayodhyā, Daśaratha allowed some time to elapse quietly and then held a meeting of his select ministers to settle the question of succession.* He laid bare before them his personal inclinations in the matter and also his grave apprehensions about the result. They fully approved of his choice of Rāma and recommended that his idea be carried into effect without delay. To ensure unhindered success they stressed secrecy in design and celerity in execution.† When the plan was well thought out, he summoned a great Council of courtiers and counsellors, rulers and chieftains, officers and citizens, and people from town and village. When they were all assembled, he addressed them. He first referred to the growing infirmities of his age, then to his pressing need for relief from the burden of administration, and lastly,

* Vālmīki : II. 1. निश्चित्य सचिवैः सार्धं यौवराज्यममन्यत ॥

† Vālmīki : II. 1. न तु केकयराजानं जनकं वा नराधिपम् ।

त्वरया चानयामास पद्माक्षौ श्रोष्यतः प्रियम् ॥

i. e. He did not invite his own father-in-law Kaikaya, or even Rāma's father-in-law Janaka, who should have been glad to be present at the ceremony of installation, saying that they could very well wait till the news floated down to their ears in course of time.

The Tilaka :— अत्र केकयजनकयोरनानयने अभिषेकविषयत्वरं हेतुः प्रोच्यते ।
वस्तुतस्तु तयोरगमने विघ्नो भविष्यतीति भिया मन्त्रिणस्तथा
बुद्धिं राज्ञे दत्तवन्त इति तात्पर्यम् ॥

having dwelt upon the exceptional merits of Rāma for the office of Yuvarāja, he begged that he be now allowed to transfer the reins of power from the older to the younger hands. Being altogether ignorant of his promise of the whole kingdom as a bridal gift to Kaikeyī in the past and being aware only of Rāma's prior claim to the throne on moral and religious grounds, the Assembly received his proposal with deafening applause. There was not a whisper of doubt or dissent.* The voice of the majority, they say, is the voice of God, and the voice of God on this occasion surpassed itself. Daśaratha was mightily pleased and he thanked all in accents faltering with emotion. And then and there he ordered his executive officers to see that the necessary arrangements were complete over-night, so that the ceremony of Installation might be celebrated the very next morning.†

This feverish haste on the part of the king has a suspicious look about it. Secondly, how is it that though invitations were sent to several kings‡ before the convention of the great Council, no messenger

* *Valmiki* : II. 2. ते तमूर्ध्वहात्मानः पौरजानपदैः सह ।
राममेवंगुणोपेतमभिषेक्तुं त्वमर्हसि ॥

† *Valmiki* : II. 3. यौवराज्याय रामस्य सर्वमेवोपकल्प्यताम् ।
सूर्ये ऽभ्युदितमात्रे स्वः प्रभाते स्वस्तिवाचनम् ।

‡ *Valmiki* : II. 1. ततः प्रविशिशुः शेषा राजानो लोकसंमताः ॥

The Tilaka :— शेषा इत्यस्य केयजनकन्यतिरिक्ता एव नृपा इत्यर्थः ।

i. e. Only with the exception of Kekaya and Janaka all other kings came to the Council Hall.

was dispatched either to the lord of Kekaya or to the lord of Mithilā in spite of their nearest relationship! This point has been slurred in *Vālmiki* and entirely skipped by other poets. The *Tilaka* commentary, however, briefly suggests that since these two were directly interested in the elevation of their grandson and son-in-law respectively to the throne, they were likely to fall out with each other and turn the auspicious affair into a scene of bloody conflict; hence they were both excluded. This deliberate omission of the two, this unwarrantable hurry in holding the function, this gigantic effort to secure the support of public opinion in a matter, namely, the transfer of power to the eldest and worthiest son, which was a time-honoured custom, a long established practice in the family of the Ikshvākus*—all this perforce leads us to one conclusion that Daśaratha had a guilty conscience from the very beginning. Indeed, it is this guilty conscience which left him so weak at the last critical moment.

In keeping Bharata out of the sight of Kaikeyī, in withholding from her all knowledge of the coming

† *Vālmiki* : II. 73.

सततं राजपुत्रेषु ज्येष्ठो राजाभिषिच्यते ।

राजामेतत्समं तत्स्यादिक्ष्वाकूणां विशेषतः ॥

Also *Manu* : IX. 105.

ज्येष्ठ एव तु गृहणीयात्सकलं पैतृकं धनम् ।

अन्ये तमनुजीवेयुर्यथैव पितरं तथा ॥

i. e. The eldest alone is entitled to the whole paternal estate; the others shall live under him just as they lived under their father.

event, and in seeking to rush through the ceremony, the idea at the back of Daśaratha's mind seems to be that while Kaikeyī remained forgetful of the right conceded to her long ago and had no time to think and protest, the whole show must be over.* For once the princely crown was placed on the head of Rāma in due form, and before the eyes of all including herself, and without anybody's objection, her tacit consent would be presumed and the old agreement would naturally lapse. This policy of *secrecy in design and celerity in execution*, which Daśaratha adopted in consultation with his ministers, was the greatest blunder of his life. It betrays his imperfect understanding of the characters of those very persons whom he sought to deceive out of their rights. If, on the contrary, he had taken Kaikeyī into his confidence and told her frankly the yearnings of his heart, in spite of his faithful remembrance of the old promise, if he had also made it plain to her that should Rāma, the legitimate heir and idol of the people, be set aside, it would spread unrest and make the kingship for her son too thorny to be worth having, this straightforward appeal to her judgement and higher self would never have

* The *Adhyātma* : II. 2.

मनस्येवं निधायैव त्वां वाचा परितोषयन् ।

भरतं मातुलकुलं प्रेषयामास पार्थिवः ॥

i. e. With this very thought in his mind, O Kaikeyī, he flattered you to the skies with airy words, and while you were in the clouds, he sent away Bharata to his maternal uncle's place.

fallen flat on her ears. She had a touch of magnanimity about her and was capable of taking a broad view, if kept in good humour.* Bharata may have been the apple of her eye, but the solace of her heart was Rāma.† And in his favour she would have generously renounced her son's claim to the succession, if Daśaratha had approached her the right way. But he rubbed her the wrong way. He sought to circumvent her in her unguarded moment, to attain his object by skilful manoeuvre, and then laugh at her in his sleeve, or wipe her tears with dry sympathy.

This shady procedure scandalised her. She was a proud woman, rather vain and filled with a sense of self-importance. And her pride was deeply hurt. On top of all, her son, who worshipped Rāma as the guiding star of his life and loved him as none else ever did, was utterly neglected, not even remembered at the installation ceremony. Thousands were invited, they were welcome guests; he alone was left out as an unwelcome person. Others would add grace to the occasion; her jewel of a son would be a disgrace to it! What other

* *Vālmiki*: II. 8.

रामो राजसुतो ज्येष्ठो यौवराज्यमतोर्हति ।

राज्यं यदि हि रामस्य भरतस्यापि तत्तदा ॥

Here Kaikeyī pleads for Rāma's prior claim to the throne.

† The *Adhyātma*: II. 2.

भरतादधिको रामः प्रियकृन्मे प्रियंवदः ॥

Here she says that Rāma is dearer to her than Bharata on account of his sweet nature.

construction was she to put upon this deliberate omission of him ? Her motherly instinct was roused. She might overlook her own wrongs, but this gratuitous insult to her son she could not tolerate. Her blue blood was up and cried for revenge. She stood upon her dignity, grew utterly callous, and insisted upon the fulfilment of the old bond in disregard of all consequences. Daśaratha and his ministers were simply nonplussed at her recalcitrant attitude. In order to frighten her and to abash her into submission, they ground their teeth, rubbed their hands, rolled their eyes, and called her names.* To move her to pity and forgiveness, they bent their heads, fell at her feet, and shed copious tears.† But she neither budged an inch, nor did she relent. She was now a Goddess turned a Gorgon and she held them all helpless in her power.‡ She threatened them with a full exposure of their machinations and

* *Vālmiki* : II. 35.

पाणिं पाणौ विनिष्पिश्य दन्तान्कटकटाय च ।
लोचने कोपसंरक्ते वर्णं पूर्वोचितं जहत् ।
कम्पयन्निव कैकेयीं सुमन्त्रः प्रत्यभाषत ॥

† *Vālmiki* : II. 12.

अञ्जलिं कुर्मि कैकेयि पादौ मूर्ध्ना स्पृशामि ते ।
इत्युक्त्वाक्षुपरीताक्षः पादयोर्निपपात ह ॥

‡ *The Adhyātma* : II. 3.

शनैरुन्मील्य नयने विमृज्य परया भिया ।
आलुलोके पुरः पत्नीं व्याघ्रीमिव पुरः स्थिताम् ॥

they quailed before her.* Had her threat related to a billing-and-cooing affair between the ailing husband and his nursing wife, or between the driving gallant and his cautious belle, as the popular belief is, they would never have given a second thought to it, but faced the world with a clear conscience and gone on with the celebrations with a blare of trumpets. For, complimentary promises of gratitude, made courteously in vague terms, could never give the receiver, be she a king's wife, power to override Cabinet and Council decisions. Such promises have at all times a strictly limited application. On the strength of these Kaikeyī could never claim the rights of Queen Regnant, and if she did, they could not be conceded and no censure incurred. Such being the case, since Kaikeyī drove the king and his ministers into a tight corner and left them looking at each other in dismay, it is evident that it was not a case of two lovers' *tiff in a pet*, but a matter involving grave political issues between the two kingdoms of Kekaya and Kōśala. Hence says Rāma† :—

* *Vālmiki*: II. 12. समयं मानृतं कार्षीः पूर्ववृत्तमनुस्मरन् ।
धार्मिकत्वं कथं वीर पृथिव्यां कथयिष्यसि ।
यदा समेता बहवस्त्वया राजर्षयः सह
कथयिष्यन्ति धर्मज्ञ तत्र किं प्रतिवक्ष्यसि ॥

i. e. Remember the past agreement and don't be false to it; otherwise you will have no face to show in the world. How will you defend your duplicity before these royal guests?

† The *Adhyātma* II. 9.

न स्त्रीजितः पिता दूयान्न कामी नैव मूढधीः ।
पूर्वं प्रतिश्रुतं तस्य सत्यवादी ददौ भयात् ॥

"Not because our sire was uxorious, or infatuated, or softened in the brain, but because he had agreed to this in categorical terms that he had to implement it through fear of future complications."

It is highly intriguing that Vasishṭha, the king's advisor-in-chief, disappeared suddenly from the scene at this juncture and was neither enquired for, nor did he show his face again till Daśaratha had closed his eyes for good.

Daśaratha was so staggered by the collapse of his undertaking that he did not recover his balance afterwards. Smarting in conscience, unsettled in mind, and paralysed in body he remained shut up in Kaikeyī's apartment and gave her a free hand to manage the sequel in her own way. From now on until the return of Bharata it was she who ruled in his name. She was virtually Kaikeyī Regina. If, at this stage, she had bethought herself a little and sent for Bharata immediately, and announced the suspension of all further proceedings until his return, she would have avoided the terrible crash that followed and earned for herself immortal fame. But having checkmated Daśaratha, she was flushed with victory, and being blinded by rage, she blundered on exultingly: she incurred instead eternal disgrace. Her tutoress throughout was Mantharā, an old nurse, as Daśaratha's preceptor was Vasishṭha, an aged priest. Both guided their disciples according to their lights, but one by open exhor-

tation* and the other by tacit approval.† They played at cross purposes, but erred the same way at a crisis, and sank into the background for ever. After the fall of Kaikeyī, Mantharā reverted to her menial tasks and passed out of notice; after the death of Daśaratha, Vasishṭha remained confined to ritual acts and became an unimportant figure afterwards. Mantharā frustrated the installation of Rāma in the interests of Bharata, but behind his back; Vasishṭha advised its celebration in the absence of Bharata, but against his claims. It is indeed strange that neither of them remembered to have him back home at the right moment, before it was too late. If they had dispatched a courier post-haste to Girivraja when the situation began to worsen, they could have averted the death of Daśaratha, the downfall of Kaikeyī, and the disruption of the family. But they sent for him after the crash was complete‡. It was

* The *Adhyāṭma* : II. 2.

मूढे शीघ्रं यतस्वाद्य भरतस्याभिषेचने ।
रामस्यानुग्रहाद्राज्ञः श्वोऽभिषेको भविष्यति ।
क्रोधागारं प्रविश्यादौ तूष्णीमातिष्ठ भामिनि ।
यावत्सत्यं प्रतिज्ञाय राजा ऽ भीष्टं करोति ते ॥

† *Ibid* : II. 2. भरतो मातुलं द्रष्टुं गतः शत्रुघ्नसंयुतः ।
अतोऽभिषेक्ष्ये श्वो रामं भवांस्तच्चानुमोदताम् ।
वसिष्ठं स्वकुलाचार्यमाहूयेदमभाषत ।
तथेति हर्षात्स मुनिः रामस्य भवनं ययौ ॥

‡ *Vālmiki* : II. 67. गत्वा वसिष्ठं ते सर्वे पृथग्वाचमुदीरयन् ।
स्वर्गस्थश्च महाराजो रामश्चारण्यमाश्रितः ।
तेषां तद्वचनं श्रुत्वा वसिष्ठो वाक्यमब्रवीत् ।
आनेतुं भरतं दूता गच्छन्तु त्वरया हयैः ॥

like calling for the fire-brigade when the house was already a heap of ashes. I do not understand why in each poem Mantharā alone should be the target of abuse and Vasishṭha the object of fulsome praise. He let Daśaratha into a political intrigue, and left him to rot on the deathbed alone, and reappeared only for the disposal of his remains.* He is everywhere styled a spiritual guide, which I never thought meant a guide to funeral rites and formal condolences.†

Now to revert to Kaikeyī, her insistence on the banishment of Rāma was, really speaking, not covered by the terms of the old marriage agreement, but it was necessitated by the recent constitutional manoeuvres of Daśaratha. Rāma had been formally proposed and unanimously accepted as the next successor to the throne both in the Cabinet and the Council. This news was received with rejoicings through the length and breadth of the kingdom. Already popular before by his heroic acts and

* Vālmiki says that Vasishṭha did not even care to see the king as he lay tossing mournfully in his bed, or to bid adieu to Rāma when he left for the forest. People had to cry vociferously at his door to inform him that the former was dead and the latter had already gone into exile. Thereupon the great Vasishṭha quietly said, 'Well, now is the time to send messengers on swiftest horses to bring Bharata.' See the quotation on page 76.

† Vālmiki : II. 78.

रुदन्तं भरतं प्राह वसिष्ठः श्रेष्ठवाग् ऋषिः ।
प्राप्तकालं नरपतेः कुरु संस्कारमुत्तमम् ॥
प्रेतकृत्यानि सर्वाणि कारयामास धर्मवित् ॥

courteous ways, he was now hailed by the people as their ideal protector in the near future. Naturally his supplantation by Bharata at this moment would never be viewed by them with equanimity. Bharata was more likely to be detested as a base schemer than tolerated as a rightful claimant. Kaikeyī, therefore, was not wrong in assuming that if Rāma continued to stay in Ayodhyā after his disinheritance, he would be a thorn in the side of her son. For even if he kept aloof from all politics, his partisans would engineer a lot of trouble in his behalf and spread unrest through the kingdom. As a result, in the very first days of his reign, Bharata would find himself on his last legs. It is some such considerations which, I think, weighed with Mr. Baldwin, when he sent the Duke of Windsor out of England immediately after his abdication in favour of his younger brother. The point has been well brought out in the speech of Mantharā* :—

“As the throne has already been offered to Rāma, its occupation now by Bharata will mean a great deprivation to him. How can a dis-

* *Vālmiki* : II. 8. 9.

यदि चेद्भरतो धर्मात् पित्र्यं राज्यमवाप्स्यति ।
 रामस्तु भरते पापं कुर्यादेव न संशयः ।
 स ते सुखोचितो बालो रामस्य सहजो रिपुः ।
 समुद्धार्थस्य नष्टार्थो जीविष्यति कथं वशे ॥
 व्यवस्थाप्य महाराजं तस्मात्त्वं वृणुया वरम् ।
 रामप्रव्राजने दूरं नव वर्षाणि पञ्च च ।
 चतुर्दश हि वर्षाणि रामे प्रव्राजिते वनम् ।
 रुढश्च कृतमूलश्च तव पुत्रो भविष्यति ॥

appointed soul ever feel kindly to one who balks him of his legitimate expectation ? Brothers before, they will be rivals hereafter. Strife and struggle will surely follow. The atmosphere will remain charged with intrigue, and cross currents will flow underground. In such a soil, seething with ferment, the authority of Bharata can never take root. Therefore, to enable him to establish his rule firmly, you must send Rāma out of the kingdom to the forest for at least fourteen years. It is a cruel necessity, this banishment of Rāma, in the present situation. As the situation is brought about by Daśaratha himself, he must also grant the remedy."

The argument was sound, as far as average humanity is concerned. But in applying it to the special case of Rāma and Bharata, Kaikeyī took no notice of their exceptional personality. She herded them with the common run of mankind, whereas they stood above the common herd. Herein lay her fatal mistake. Another irony was that when she turned relentless in what she considered to be her son's interests, she never cared to enquire where exactly his own interests lay. The result was that while she thought she was doing him infinite good, she was actually causing him incalculable harm. She thus acted like a learned fool who took a fish out of water and put it tenderly in a pot of butter. She proceeded on the general assumption that sovereignty was more covetable than service. But rules have their exceptions, and Bharata was a glorious exception to the general rule. To serve under Rāma was

heaven to him; to reign without him was hell itself.* His was a soul cast in a different mould, and this she entirely forgot. Indeed, to apply general principles mechanically, without due regard to their limitations, is to court disaster, and this she had to the full. She lost everything—her name, her rank, her happiness. She lost the love and regard of her own son,† for whose sake she had not even recoiled from the horrors of widowhood!‡ Her triumph was of short duration. For, the very moment Bharata arrived in Ayodhyā, she became a nonentity and passed out of the picture for ever—‘unwept, unhonoured, and unsung’—into mournful obscurity! She realised her mistake in the end, but it was then too late to mend.§

* The *Adhyātma* : II. 7.

रामे ऽरण्यं प्रयाते भवति च निखिलं राज्यमेतत्सुधोरम् ।
तस्माद्रामं ससीतं स्मितरुचिरमुखं नित्यमेवानुसेवे ॥

† *Vālmiki* : II. 74.

मातृरूपे ममा ऽमित्रे नृशंसे राज्यकामुके ।
न ते ऽहमभिभाष्यो ऽस्मि दुर्वृत्ते पापघातिनि ।
सा त्वमग्निं प्रविश वा स्वयं वा विश दंडकान् ।
रज्जुं बद्ध्वा ऽथवा कण्ठे न हि ते ऽन्यत्परायणम् ॥

‡ *Vālmiki* : II. 12.

मृते मयि गते रामे वनं पुरुषपुंगवे ।
सेदानीं विधवा राज्यं सपुत्रा कारिष्यसि ॥

§ The *Adhyātma* : II. 9.

कैकेयी राममेकान्ते स्ववेत्रजलाकुला ।
प्राञ्जलिः प्राह हे राम तव राज्यविधातनम् ।
कृतं मया दुष्टधिया मायामोहितचेतसा ।
क्षमस्व मम दौरात्म्यं क्षमासारा हि साधवः ॥

(Continued on next page)

What was Rāma doing all the while? He restrained himself from all action, because he saw the right action in inaction itself.* Thus by doing nothing he achieved a great thing. He had the whole situation clear in his mind. He let the things drift in their own way, because the end to which they were drifting was the only possible beginning to his future career. He knew the secret of Daśaratha and watched his faulty steps, but neither did he wake him up at the right moment, nor did he suggest to him the way of escape when he was cornered. He knew the pride of Kaikeyī and the extent to which she would go; also the mind of Bharata and the danger that would spring from him to his design. True to his own purpose, he fortified his heart and maintained throughout studious silence. He did not even raise a protest when his father cast reflections on the character of Bharata in defence of his

(Continued from the previous page)

i. e. With her eyes streaming with tears, Kaikeyī said to Rāma in private at Chitrakūṭa, 'It was through sheer wickedness that I came in the way of your succession. I was then blinded by rage and passion for revenge; hence could not foresee the consequences of my act. But now I repent sincerely of what I did. Have mercy upon me, Rāma. I implore you with folded hands.'

* The *Gītā* : IV. 18. कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येदकर्मणि च कर्म यः ।

स बुद्धिमान्मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ॥

i. e. Among men he is said to be gifted with superintelligence who, while performing all his duties in a calm and composed manner, sees inaction in action and action in inaction.

own deliberate neglect of him at the Installation ceremony* :—

“I have purposely chosen to install you during the absence of Bharata, because while he stays away from here, that in my opinion is the safest time to hold this function. I grant that Bharata has virtuous looks, but my experience of the world teaches me that we must not trust too much to appearances: they are as often as not deceptive. Even a saintly heart turns sordid when personal interests are at stake. Therefore, if we wait for him, I am afraid he may create insurmountable difficulties in our way. Hence his absence from this place is the most opportune time for our purpose”.

It is highly significant that Rāma listened to these insinuations against his selfless brother calmly.

* *Vālmiki* : II. 4.

विप्रोषितश्च भरतो यावदेव पुरादितः ।
तावदेवाभिषेकस्ते प्राप्तकालो मतो मम ।
कामं खलु सतां वृत्ते भ्राता ते भरतः स्थितः ।
किं नु चित्तं मनुष्याणामनित्यमिति मे मतिः ।
सतां च धर्मनित्यानां कृतशोभि च राघव ॥

The Tilaka :— भरतस्यागमनात्पूर्वमेव तवाभिषेकस्यैष प्राप्तः कालो योग्यः, अन्यथा भरतः प्रतिवधनीयात् इति भावः । ननु भरते कथमेषा शंका युक्ता इत्यत आह । मनुष्याणां चित्तं स्नेहादिमदपि अनित्यम् । विकारनिमित्ते सति विक्रियेत इत्यर्थः । यतः सतामपि चित्तं तत्तन्निमित्तकृतेन रागेद्वेषादिना शोभते युज्यते, न तु सर्वथा स्वतो नियतकिञ्चित्स्वभावमित्यर्थः ।

This clearly bears out my previous assertion that Daśaratha had a guilty conscience from the very beginning and that Bharata's visit to Kekaya was a part of his design.

He did not betray in look, voice, or gesture any resentment that he must have felt deeply within. Why did he let his father labour under so ridiculous a misapprehension about one who wore his heart upon his sleeve? The only explanation is that he did not wish to put his father wise to the true nature of Bharata. He knew full well that if Bharata was informed of his forthcoming installation, he would come immediately and that, if on his arrival Kaikeyī dared to stand in the way, he would throw her aside without a thought, and renounce his claim to the throne in public, and offer the crown to him on bended knees with his own hands. How would he then have the heart—and on what grounds too—to refuse the offer so lovingly made, with such humility, in the presence of his parents, before the eyes of the people, all cheering with one voice! A poet observes* :—

“Of all the bonds in the world, the strongest and most unbreakable are the bonds of love. The black bee, when confined, makes a passage even through the toughest wood and sets itself free; yet such is its love for the lotus that when its frail petals close upon it in the evening, it lies unresisting within in spite of suffocation”.

Thus the presence of Bharata would mean an exceedingly delicate obstacle in his own way: he

* *Anon.*

बन्धनानि किल सन्ति बहूनि
स्नेहरज्जुकृतबन्धनमन्यत् ॥
दारुभेदनिपुणोऽपि षडङ्घ्रि-
निष्क्रियो भवति पंकजबद्धः ॥

would be tied down to the place by the chains of royalty, and these would not leave him the freedom he needed for the main task of his life. On these considerations he kept his own counsel and thanked the gods for sending a cloud on the intellects of his parents and ministers.

That Rāma had foreseen the impending crash is evident from his own suggestive words on two occasions. When his mother Kausalyā received the news from him that he was to be coronated the next day, she could hardly contain herself with joy; the blessings which rose to her lips her voice failed to articulate. Drawing him close to her bosom, she bathed him with tears. He withdrew himself gently from her arms, and smiling sadly, said to Lakshmaṇa* :--

“To you also, my second self, has befallen the same sovereignty as is in store for me. Henceforth lies before us two the vast earth, unlimited and free, which let us both join our efforts to rule. Enjoy, my dear, to your heart's content the fruits of royalty which, by virtue of your intimate association with me, shall within your reach be.”

* *Vālmāki* : II. 4.

रामो भ्रातरमव्रूत अभिवीक्ष्य स्मयन्निव ।
 लक्ष्मणेमां मया सार्धं प्रशाधि त्वं वसुन्धराम् ।
 द्वितीयं मेऽन्तरात्मानं त्वामियं श्रीरुपस्थिता ।
 सौमित्रे मुंक्ष्व भोगांस्त्वमिष्टान् राज्यफलानि च ।
 जीवितञ्चापि राज्यञ्च त्वदर्थमभिकांक्षये ॥

The bitter irony in this speech is too obvious to need elucidation, though to his own mother, beside herself with joy, it was scarcely noticeable. The second occasion was when Sumantra, the minister of the Chamber, reported to him at early morn that Mahārāja Daśaratha and Rāṇī Kaikeyī both desired his presence immediately. From the minister's report that the king, who was hale and hearty the day before, had suddenly fallen ill in Kaikeyī's apartment and was too weak to stir out of bed, he forthwith concluded that '*the engineer was hoist with his own petard*', that his father's sudden break-down was not due to exhaustion of work, as many believed, but to frustration of his design, which few suspected. While leaving for Kaikeyī's palace, he said quizzically to Sītā* : —

* *Vālmiki* : II. 16.

देवि देवश्च देवी च समागम्य मदन्तरे ।
मन्त्रयेते ध्रुवं किञ्चिदभिषेचनसंहितम् ।
लक्षयित्वा ह्यभिप्रायं प्रियकामा सुदक्षिणा ।
संचोदयति राजानं मदर्थमसितेक्षणा ।
सा प्रहृष्टा महाराजं हितकामानुवर्तिनी ।
जननी चार्थकामा मे कैकयाधिपतेः सुता ।
यादृशी परिषत्तत्र तादृशो दूत आगतः ।
ध्रुवमद्यैव मां राजा यौवराज्येऽभिषेक्षति ॥

The Tilaka :—अभिषेकद्वारकं वनगमनरूपमस्माभिश्चिन्त्यमानं संप्रति मन्त्रयेते कैकेयी महाराजश्चेत्यर्थो गर्भितः । रावणवधरूपं मदभिप्रायमन्तःप्रेरणया लक्षयित्वा सा कैकेयी मदभीष्टसंपादने समर्था मज्जीवितप्रयोजनफलकवनगमनार्थं महाराजं त्वरयतीत्यर्थः ।

"I believe, my dear, that the king and the queen are in close consultation together about some important thing connected with this very affair of my installation. The keen-sighted Kaikeyī has, I am sure, correctly divined my inmost wishes, and always attentive to my true interests, has after all prevailed upon the king to allow what I have been waiting for so long. The forthcoming interview is thus of a very delicate nature, and very secret too; hence has the king dispatched his confidential messenger to me at the glimmer of dawn. Well, as far as I see, it will prove the dawn of my future; for the king will surely invest me, this very day, with power to proceed unhindered with my royal task".

It is worthy of note that Sītā, gifted as she was with quick intellect, understood the full implication of these words; for she said in reply* :—

"Yes, my lord ! It is in the supreme kingship of mankind that your Sire intends to place you. I already see you clad in a deer's skin, armed with a bow, intent upon sacrifice of self, and

* *Vālmīki* : II. 16.

कर्तुमर्हति राजा ते राजसूयाभिषेचनम् ।
दीक्षितं व्रतसंपन्नं मृगाजिनधरं शुचिम् ।
कुरंगशृंगपाणिं च पश्यन्ती त्वां भजाम्यहम् ॥

The *Tilaka* :— सर्वपीडको रावणो नाम राजा सूयते कण्डयते तत्र तादृशकर्मणि
तवाभिषेकं करिष्यति महाराजः । तस्मिन् राजसूये गृहीत-
व्रतं त्वामहं भजिष्ये । अनेनाहमपि त्वया सह वनं
यास्यामीति सूचितम् ।

therefore destined to rule over all. I wish you good luck in the trial ahead".

If we take a comprehensive view of all facts concerning the behaviour of Rāma on this eventful occasion—Nārada's deep anxiety about the future and *his* definite assurance to him, Daśaratha's distrust of Bharata and *his* connivance at it, Kausalyā's inexpressible joy and *his* implied warning, Kaikeyī's urgent call at dawn and *his* correct forecast of the interview, *his* smiling hint to Sitā and her willing amen to it— there is no room for doubt that Rāma knew all along what intrigue was afoot and how it would end in a fiasco. If he had so chosen, he could have by timely action prevented the tragedy that occurred in his family. But in that case it would have been impossible for him to avert the doom that was fast descending upon his race. Conditions in Āryāvarta, as we have seen before, were not at all favourable to open warfare against Rāvaṇa. He had striven hard to bring the kshatriya princes together into "a serried phalanx tight", but in vain. Alone he was not a match for him. The fate of Anaraṇya, fighting single-handed, was fresh in his mind. To take the field, therefore, openly against Rāvaṇa was not bravery, but sheer bravado. Wisdom suggested that Rāvaṇa must be hoodwinked first, and then only could he be overthrown. But how? As the crowned king of Ayodhyā, he could not enter his territory except to fight him as an enemy, or to make him obeisance as his liege lord. Both the alternatives were out of the question. But as a disinherited prince, debarred from the throne by his

father, stripped of everything by his mother, expelled to no-man's-land by the logic of events, he could, without rousing the least suspicion, take up his quarters on the very borders of Rāvaṇa's empire, then creep gradually inside, and weave a noose imperceptibly around him and tighten it at the right moment so well that the knot must catch his throat and make all his struggles futile. As he visualised his future course, he saw nothing but success at the other end. Should he forgo it for the sake of a few individuals of his family? Let them err and by erring leave the path open to him. With these thoughts uppermost in his mind, he shut his eyes to whatever might happen at home and maintained a diplomatic silence throughout. Finally on the plea of 'dutiful obedience to my mother Kaikeyī's orders',* he made a sudden departure from Ayodhyā, notwithstanding the critical condition of his father, not even waiting for the return of Bharata, or why, in order to avoid a meeting with him, he made his marches so rapid and his halts so short that by the time Bharata was back in Ayodhyā, he was scores of miles away at Chitrakūṭa, with his body clothed in bark garments, his hair matted with the milk of a

* *Vālmiki* : II. 19.

श्रुत्वा गतव्यथो रामः कैकेयीं वाक्यमब्रवीत् ।

अनुक्तोऽप्यत्रभवता भवत्या वचनादहम् ।

वने वत्स्यामि विजने वर्षाणीह चतुर्दश ॥

i. e. On hearing the words of Kaikeyī, Rāma cheered up and said, " Although my revered father does not say anything, yet if you wish me to go into exile for fourteen years, I shall deem it an honour to fulfil your wishes. "

fig tree, himself in secret conclave with venerable sages—of whom a few daring spirits had long left for Dandakā to prepare the ground for him as pioneers !

Before we proceed any further with Rāma, let us settle a few knotty questions about Lakshmaṇa, Sītā, and Ūrmilā. Why did Rāma take Lakshmaṇa away with him at a time when his father was sinking fast ? His hour had come, anybody could see that. All lustre had vanished from his eyes. The shadow of death was upon his face. Indeed, the flame of life could hardly be expected to burn long under a ceaseless flood of tears and a storm of unceasing sighs ! Bharata and Śatrughna were far away, so far that even if they came at a run or flew back on wings, they would still be too late. He himself had to quit immediately at Kaikeyī's behest. But she had no grudge against Lakshmaṇa. He could very well stay behind, and 'upon his filial breast the parting soul could recline.' All the same Rāma did not think it wise, or even kind, to leave him behind. The plain answer to this riddle is that Lakshmaṇa, instead of being a solace to his father in his last moments, would have become a source of lasting unrest in the kingdom. He was notoriously irascible by nature. Whenever he was stirred by a sense of wrong, his instincts of justice were apt to degenerate into mere vindictiveness. It is on this account that mythology conceives of him as an incarnation of the divine Cobra.* He had no reasoning, only an excess

* The *Padma* : अनन्तात्मा च लक्ष्मणः ।

The *Tilaka* : तस्य शेषावतारत्वे तमोगुणप्रधानता ।

of feeling. He held Bharata responsible for all that happened, because whatever happened was for his sake. If he had not come into the world, nothing untoward would have come to pass, and the world would have been much better off. Lakshmaṇa, therefore, wanted to kill him. But that much only would not satisfy him. He must slaughter all his relations on the side of his mother and all his well-wishers on this side of the grave* ! As regards Daśaratha, he doted upon a temptress of a wife and turned against an angel of a son. He was thus senile as well as hostile. For the first offence, Lakshmaṇa would clap him by the heels and let him rot in prison; for the second offence, he would squeeze him by the neck and toss his head off to the winds† !

Rāma was much vexed to hear Lakshmaṇa go on in this blood-thirsty strain. But he did not stop him; he let him fulminate to the top of his bent and thus let off all his fury in threats and curses. When he

* *Vālmīki* : II. 21 & 23.

लक्ष्मणो भुङ्कुटिं वद्ध्वा तिर्यग्भ्रातरमब्रवीत् ।
 निशद्वास महासर्पो विलस्थ इव रोषितः ।
 यत्कृते व्यसनं प्राप्तं त्वया राघव सांप्रतम् ।
 पूर्वापकारी भरतस्तद्वधे धर्म एव हि ।
 भरतस्यास्य पक्षयो वा यो वाऽस्य हितमिच्छति ।
 सर्वास्तांश्च वधिष्यामि मृदुहिं परिभूयते ॥

† The *Vālmīki* : II. 21.

हरिष्ये पितरं वृद्धं कैकेयासक्तमानसम् ।
 क्लृपणं कामुकत्वेन वृद्धभावेऽपि गर्हितम् ।
 प्रोत्साहितोऽयं कैकेया संतुष्टो यदि नः पिता ।
 अमिन्नभूतो निःसंगं बध्यतां बध्यतामपि ॥

calmed down a little, Rāma brought him round gradually to a more sensible view of the situation. He appeared peaceful for the time being, but he could not be trusted alone for ever. In no case was it safe to leave him behind. He was good at heart, but his nature was at fault. Under provocation he lost his head, flew into a rage, never bethought himself, but only thought of sending whosoever stood in his way to hell*. Rāma alone could control him and keep him steady; none else could. Hence in his absence what might not happen ! Lakshmaṇa was remarkably brave and absolutely chaste. But his nature was fiery, and like fire he could be exceedingly useful as well as extremely dangerous. Rāma, therefore, determined to take him along with himself rather than leave him to his own self. He knew accurately what sterling qualities he had, and thoroughly appreciated one trait of his—implicit obedience to Rāma under any circumstances. He would therefore take him in his hand, and use him as his right arm in the execution of his great design, and lead him along with himself to a place sublime in the Temple of Fame.

There was one more danger in leaving Lakshmaṇa behind, namely, his mother Kausalyā's present state of mind. Her relations with Daśaratha and Kaikeyī were none too cordial before; the former slighted her,

* *Vālmiki* : II. 21.

हृनिष्यामि शरैस्तीक्ष्णैर्यदि तिष्ठति विप्रिये ।

the latter snubbed her* Though in the outside world she was known to occupy the exalted rank of Eldest Queen, yet actually in the household she was degraded to the lowest place. Even the toilette-maids of her co-wife had the precedence of her in every respect.† She was even stinted in the ordinary comforts of life.‡ Under these humiliating conditions

* *Vālmiki*: II. 12.

न मया सत्कृता देवी सत्कारार्हा कृते तव ।

इदानीं तत्तपति मां यन्मया सुकृतं त्वयि ॥

Here Daśaratha confesses to Kaikeyī, "For your sake I never treated Kausalyā with honour, though she deserved honourable treatment. Now it burns me with remorse that I should have yielded to your wishes to such an extent".

Vālmiki: II. 20. तदक्षयं महद् दुःखं नोत्सहे सहितुं चिरात् ।

विप्रकारं च कैकेय्या एवं जीर्णास्मि राघव ॥

Here Kausalyā says to Rāma, "I have grown old, bearing humiliations patiently at Kaikeyī's hands. But now I cannot endure mental tortures any longer."

† *Vālmiki*: II. 20.

परिवारेण कैकेय्याः समा वाप्यधरा वरा ॥

i. e. Although I am the eldest queen, yet less regard is paid to me than to the servants of Kaikeyī. I have to hang down my head before them.

‡ *Vālmiki*: II. 20.

न दृष्टपूर्वं कल्याणं सुखं वा पतिपौरुषे ॥

The *Tilaka*:— पतिपौरुषे पत्यनुरागे सति, यत्प्राप्य कल्याणं प्रशस्तवस्त्रा-
भरणादिकं, सुखञ्च पतिसंभोगजं, तन्मया न पूर्वं
दृष्टमित्यर्थः ॥

i. e. Owing to the absence of marital affection I have had no fine clothes, no costly ornaments, nor even amatory pleasures from my husband.

her only joy, her only hope, her only support of life, was her jewel of a son, Rāma. He, by his amiable ways, had softened the obdurate heart of Kaikeyī,* brought good will and harmony in place of rivalries and jealousies. To Kausalyā, therefore, he was as it were the sun, flooding her otherwise gloomy world with light. To his installation as Crown Prince she looked forward with intense longing; for, as *Rājāmātā* at least, she would have that place of honour which, as *Rājamahishī*, was unfairly denied to her. But all her fond expectations suddenly proved castles in the air. The morning fixed for the ceremony, which she believed would be the dawn of her future happiness, turned out to be the dusk of eternal night. It brought to her the news, not of her son's elevation to the throne, but of his transportation to Dandakā, the darkest spot on earth. From the summit of joy she fell headlong into abysmal gloom. Darkness came over all her faculties. Blank despair surrounded her on all sides. Who were responsible for this? Assuredly Daśaratha and Kaikeyī. What other feel-

* *Vālmiki*: II. 8.

यथा वै भरतो मान्यस्तथा भूयोऽपि राघवः ।

कौसल्यातोऽतिरिक्तञ्च मम शुश्रूषते बहु ॥

i. e. I love Rāma as much as I do Bharata; for he pays me greater regard than to his own mother,

ings could she have for them but of bitterest hate !
Convulsed with grief, she exclaimed* :—

“Daśaratha may concede to Kaikeyī whatever within his power lies, but what right has he to tear away from me my own flesh and blood ? He may raise Bharata to heaven, I do not grudge it; but what justification has he to send my son to hell ? What merits Bharata has evinced to deserve such partial treatment, I do not care to ask, nor am I interested in it; but what I am vitally concerned about and have every right to know is, what faults has my Rāma committed to merit such brutal punishment ? In the face of such brazenfaced, inhuman, gross injustice to you who have always been so dear to both, what hope now is left for me who have all along been an object of neglect and scorn ? What shall be my lot here when you are there in

* The *Adhyātma* : II. 4.

भरताय प्रसन्नश्चेद्राज्यं राजा प्रयच्छतु ।
किमर्थं वनवासाय त्वामाज्ञापयति प्रियम् ।
कैकेय्या वरदो राजा सर्वस्वं वा प्रयच्छतु ।
त्वया किमपराद्धं हि कैकेय्या वा नृपस्य वा ॥

Also *Vālmīki* : II. 20.

नित्यक्रोधतया तस्याः कथं नु खरवादिनम् ।
कैकेय्या वदनं द्रष्टुं पुत्र शक्यामि दुर्गता ।
त्वयि संनिहितेऽन्येवमहमासं निराकृता ।
किं पुनः प्रोषिते तात ध्रुवं मरणमेव वा ।
धर्मज्ञ इति धर्मिष्ठ धर्मं चरितुमिच्छसि ।
शुश्रूष मामिहस्थस्त्वं न चाधर्म्यं वचः शृणु ॥

exile ? Have you no pity for your helpless mother, Rāma ? Will you leave me a prey to one swelled-headed and the other hen-pecked ? You are, as you say, a champion of justice. Let justice begin at home first and let my wrongs be righted forthwith."

While Kausalyā was thus in a distracted mood, altogether crazed with grief, up rose Lakshmana with a resolution to go a cutting, hacking, and killing all those who dictated or desired or occasioned Rāma's expulsion to the forest. His terrible words were music to her soul. They promised a clear-cut solution of all her difficulties, and that was the only possible solution under the present circumstances. It was no doubt a parricidal proposal, but she did not condemn it outright, as Rāma did. She rather acquiesced in it. Indeed, to her, situated as she was, even stark widowhood with her Rāma close by, reigning gloriously, was hundred times preferable to wretched wifehood without him—him trudging his weary way through the dark forest, subject to hunger and thirst, and to dangers unthinkable. She looked at the countenance of Rāma; it registered vexation at the fiery speech of Lakshmana. She hesitated a little, then stammered out* :—

"Dost thou hear, my son, what thy brother Lakshmana says ! If it meets with thine approval,

* *Vālmiki* : II. 21.

उवाच रामं कौसल्या रुदती शोकलालसा ।
भ्रातुस्ते वदतः पुत्र लक्ष्मणस्य श्रुतं त्वया ।
यदज्ञानन्तरं तत्त्वं कुरुष्व यदि रोचते ।

I for one shall not object to thy giving effect to it."

Rāma silenced both, the proposer and the seconder. But he saw the danger of leaving them together. The association of the two, one storming with rage and the other inflamed with grief, might prove a source of conflagration in the royal family behind his back. This eventuality must be put beyond all possibility of occurrence. Rāma took no chances in his life. He did not rest contented with their assurances to keep peaceful. He took Lakshmaṇa away with him. Sumitrā, who had her wits about her, saw the wisdom of Rāma and did not object to separation from her own son. That Rāma was right in not trusting Lakshmaṇa alone was fully borne out by what happened at Chitrakūṭa. At the approach of Bharata there, the first impulse of Lakshmaṇa was to shoot him.* But Rāma was there to hold him

* *Vālmiki*: II. 96.

यन्निमित्तं भवान् राज्याच्च्युतो राघव शाश्वतात् ।

संप्राप्तो ऽ यमरिर्वीर भरतो वध्य एव हि ।

कैकेयीं च वधिष्यामि सानुवन्धां सवान्धवाम् ।

अद्यैव चित्रकूटस्य काननं निशितैः शरैः ।

छिन्दन् शत्रुशरीराणि करिष्ये शोणितोक्षितम् ॥

i. e. Here comes Bharata, our enemy, on whose account you have been turned out of the kingdom. He certainly deserves to be killed. I shall also put to death his mother Kaikeyī, and all her paternal and maternal relations. They are all our enemies; hence I will pierce their bodies with my sharp arrows and drench the forest ground of Chitrakūṭa with their blood today.

back, and he held him back from rashness at all times.

As regards *Sitā*, *Rāma* was most unwilling to take her with him, and rightly too. His object in leaving *Ayodhyā* was not to idle away his time in forest sojourn, but to utilise it in purposeful action. He stood alone and helpless against the mighty power of *Rāvaṇa*. He could not grapple with it openly; he had to delve under it as well as infiltrate through it. For this he had to study the land, formulate suitable plans, find the necessary material, and procure the right sort of men. This required taking counsel with some and giving directions to others, winning over some and inveigling others. He had to move about briskly, covering his steps and weave a vast net of organisation, interlacing each thread so carefully that a tangle might never ensue. In the performance of such a task, so intricate and so strenuous, *Sitā* would rather be a drag on him than an asset to him. He would have to regulate his pace according to her ability to sustain fatigue. Her safety would be his constant anxiety at all times. He, therefore, sincerely wished her to stay behind. But she sternly refused to stay behind—she who never disobeyed him either before or after. Why? The poets, in answer to this question, only idealise her wifely love and devotion. Some say that she could never live, for a moment even, without *Rāma*;^{*}

* *Vālmīki* : II. 29. पतिहीना तु या नारी न सा शक्यति जीवितुम् ।

त्वद्वियोगेन मे राम त्यक्तव्यमिह जीवितम् ॥

i. e. How can a woman live without her husband? The moment you part from me, life will depart from my body.

of this Rāma was convinced; hence rather than leave her corpse behind he preferred to take her bodily with him. They forget that she could live all right without Rāma afterwards, for twelve long years, in disgraceful abandonment. Others say that she was bent upon suicide, if Rāma left her behind;* by this Rāma was impressed; hence rather than have her blood upon his head he chose to bend his head to her wishes. They forget that such threats were uttered by many, but Rāma never listened to them. His own mother Kausalyā said† :—

“Listen, my son, if you do not stay with me here in obedience to my legitimate wishes, or go away without me in submission to Kaikeyi’s unjust demand, I will in either case starve myself to death; for I can never live without you.”

But Rāma remained unmoved. He neither stayed with her, nor let her follow him to the forest. Similarly his selfless brother Bharata said† :—

* *Ibid* : II. 29. यदि मां दुःखितामेवं वनं नेतुं न चेच्छसि ।

विषमग्निं जलं वाहमास्थास्ये मृत्युकारणात् ॥

i. e. If you do not take me to the forest with you, but leave me here in affliction, I will either burn myself to ashes or drown myself to death.

† *Vālmiki* : II. 21 & 24.

सा ऽहं त्वां नानुजानामि न गन्तव्यमितो वनम् ।

शुश्रूष मामिहस्थस्त्वं न चाधर्म्यं वचः शृणु ।

यदि त्वं यास्यसि वनं त्यक्त्वा मां शोकलालसाम् ।

अहं प्रायमिहासिष्ये न च शक्यामि जीवितुम् ॥

† *The Adhyātma* : II. 9. also *Vālmiki* II. 111.

अहमप्यागमिष्यामि सेवे त्वां लक्ष्मणो यथा ।

नोचेत्प्रायोपवेशेन त्यजाम्येतत्कलेवरम् ॥

"I will also accompany you to the forest and serve you like Lakshmana. If you do not allow me, I will abstain from food and drink, and let my body drop dead here."

But Rāma turned a deaf ear and sent him back to Ayodhyā from Chitrakūṭa. So also his unsophisticated friend Guha said* :—

"Let me come along with you, I pray. If you object, I will forthwith embrace death."

But Rāma paid no heed. He charged him to stay at home and turned his face away.

From all these instances are we to conclude that Rāma was sentimental and solicitous about his wife only, but callous and indifferent to his mother, brother, and friend? Even the biased inference about his softness of heart towards Sītā is vitiated by what he did to her later on. He cast her away lightly like a piece of straw and made no fuss about it.† The correct view, therefore, seems to be that there was no room for sentimentality in Rāma. Unless the action proposed was seconded by reason, approved by conscience, and justified by circumstances, he would never consent to it, be the threats as terrible, and appeals as tender, as they liked. He had a genial soul no doubt, but a stern heart

* The *Adhyātma* : II. 6.

गुहो ऽपि राघवं प्राह गमिष्यामि त्वया सह ।
अनुज्ञां देहि राजेन्द्र नोचेत्प्राणांस्त्यजाम्यहम् ॥

† *Bhavabhūti* : III.

तृणमिव वने शून्ये त्यक्ता न चाप्यनुशोचिता ।

without question; hence he stood, sweet in smile but firm as a rock, amid the rolling waves of life. He yielded to Sitā on this occasion, not because of her tearful looks, or pathetic appeals, or bitter taunts, not even because of her threats of suicide, but because her insistence was just and her argument unanswerable. She said :—

“My lord, you have not only lost your claim to the throne, but even your right to stay inside the kingdom. What right then can I, your second half, have to continue here? What place of honour is there now for me in this household, which is dominated by the very same Kaikeyī who has thrown my lord of life out of inheritance into wilderness, away from his own native land, to be a homeless wanderer in future.* You have been stripped of even your clothes and given instead coarse garments of bark.† What covering

* *Vālmiki*: II. 18.

अतोऽहमभिधास्यामि न राजा त्वयि वक्ष्यति ।

अभिषेकमिदं त्यक्त्वा जटाचीरधरो भव ।

सप्त सप्त च वर्षाणि दण्डकारण्यमाश्रय ॥

Here Kaikeyī says, “Since the king will not speak, you have now to take orders from me. Give up all thought of installation, and having put on the dress of an hermit, go straight to Dandakaraṇya for fourteen years”.

† *Vālmiki*: II. 37. अथ चीराणि कैकेयी स्वयमाहृत्य राघवम् ।

उवाच परिधत्स्वेति जनौघे निरपत्रपा ॥

i. e. Kaikeyī brought bark garments with her own hand and said to Rāma, without the slightest touch of shame, in the presence of a crowd of people, “Put on these in place of your princely clothes”.

is now left for me but bark to hide my shame ?
 A hermit's dress, my lord, the only dress now for
 me, is altogether grotesque in the palace without
 you, but quite graceful in the forest with you.
 Let me remind you, my lord, that when your own
 self-respect is concerned, you are very particular.
 Now that you are under orders to quit Kośala,
 you think it undignifying to touch even a morsel
 of food as long as you are inside the kingdom.
 You have even refused to comply with the wishes
 of your father who has begged of you so press-
 ingly to dine with him at least once before
 parting. Evidently you feel, and rightly too, that
 now all food in Kośala has turned to ashes for
 you.* How do you then, my lord, expect me to

* *Vālmiki* : II. 24.

अद्यत्विदानीं रजनीं पुत्र मा गच्छ सर्वथा ।
 एकाहं दर्शनेनापि साधु तावच्चराम्यहम् ।
 अथ रामस्तदा श्रुत्वा पितुरार्तस्य भाषितम् ।
 न च शक्यं मया तात स्थातुं क्षणमपि प्रभो ।
 प्राप्स्यामि यानद्य गुणान्को मे इवस्तान्प्रदास्यति ॥

i. e. "Don't go away at least for one night, my son. Let me have the pleasure of dining with you for the last time". On hearing the appealing words of his father who was smitten with melancholy, Rāma said coldly, "I cannot stay here now even for one moment, my father. Whatever sumptuous dishes you will order for me today, none is going to offer them to me from tomorrow. So it is better to relinquish the pleasures of the table from today. Adieu, my father".

(Continued on next page)

feed on these ashes which you leave behind for me ? You may have conceded everything to Bharata, but certainly not your honour. Is not my honour included in yours ? If you give me away into the hands of one who has dispossessed

(Continued from the previous page)

It is worth noting that when his friend Guha offered him edibles and drinks of all kinds on the bank of the Ganges, Rama thanked him heartily for his kindness, but refused to touch any of the things served before him. He excused himself by saying that he did not like to live on charity. He asked Lakshmana to fetch him water from the river, and this only he drank. It is only after he had crossed the Ganges and was out of Kośala that he killed a deer, which the three ate after cooking and worshipping the deities.

Valmiki : II. 50.

भक्ष्यं भोज्यञ्च लेह्यञ्च पेयञ्चैतदुपस्थितम् ।

गुहमेवं ब्रुवाणं तु राघवः प्रत्युवाच ह ।

सर्वं तदनुजानामि न हि वर्ते प्रतिग्रहे ।

जलमेवाददे तत्र लक्ष्मणेनाहृतं स्वयम् ॥

The Adhyātma : II. 6.

निवर्तयामास गुहं गंगापारं समाश्रितः ।

तत्र मेध्यं मृगं हत्वा पक्त्वा हुत्वा च ते त्रयः ।

भुक्त्वा वृक्षतले सुप्त्वा सुखमासत तां निशम् ॥

So keen, indeed, was Rama's sense of self-respect that once the kingdom of Kośala was declared to be Kaikeyi's property, he thought it a shame to eat anything, fruit or root, fish, flesh or fowl, belonging to that kingdom. He broke his fast only after he was beyond its boundary line, the Ganges. Hence says the *Āg্নiveśya* :—

त्रिरात्रमुदकाहारश्चतुर्थेऽह्नि मृगाशनः ।

पंचमे चित्रकूटे तु रामो वासमकारयत् ॥

you of all fortune and cast you out of your native soil, what other status can I have but that of a slave to him, living by his sufferance, at his mercy, by no earthly right of my own ? You say that Bharata will treat me well. Perhaps he may. But his treatment will reflect credit on his goodness; it can never add lustre to my shameful existence here.* You talk of difficulties and dangers on my account, but a true hero grapples with them manfully, does not boggle at them.† If you do, I call you a coward and cry shame upon your white-livered self ! What did my father mean by giving me to one who has only the form of a man but really the spirit of a woman‡ ! If you seek to smoothen your path by leaving me behind in the hands of your successful rivals, you are no better than those contemptible wretches who solve their problem of life by

* *Vālmiki* : II. 30.

यस्य पथ्यञ्च रामात्थ यस्य चार्थे ऽ वरुध्यसे ।
त्वं तस्य भव वरुध्यश्च नाहं स्थास्यामि तद्वशे ॥

† *Vālmiki* : II. 30.

किं हि कृत्वा विषण्णस्त्वं क्षत्रियस्य कुतो भयम् ।
यत्परित्यक्तुकामस्त्वं मामनन्यपरायणम् ।

‡ *Ibid* : II. 30.

किं त्वामन्यत वैदेहः पिता मे मिथिलाधिपः ।
राम जामातरं प्राप्य स्त्रियं पुरुषविग्रहम् ॥

The *Tilaka* :— यदि मे पिता त्वां केवलमाकारेण पुरुषं क्रियया तु स्त्रियं जानीयात्तर्हि मां तुभ्यं न प्रयच्छेदिति ।

placing their wives at the disposal of others.* Having taken my hand in marriage for better for worse, if you wriggle yourself out of your responsibility to me, what credit, I ask, is there in fulfilling what you call your duty to your father who does not want you to perform it ?† However, I am bound to you body and soul before the sacred fire : those bonds are unbreakable. If you still do not take me with you, this soul of mine shall not rot in bondage to another, but fly free out of this body to be for ever with you".‡

Rāma had to admit the force of her reasoning and take her ultimately with him.

* *Valmiki* : II. 30.

स्वयं तु भार्या कौमारीं चिरमध्युषितां सतीम् ।

शैलूष इव मां राम परेभ्यो दातुमिच्छसि ॥

शैलूष :— one who leads a life of ease and comfort at the cost of his wife's honour.

† *Valmiki* : II. 34.

उवाच राजा संप्रेक्ष्य वनवासाय राघवम् ।

अयोध्यायां त्वमेवाद्य भव राजा निगृह्य माम् ॥

i. e. When Daśaratha saw that Rāma was determined to go to the forest at the words of Kaikeyī, he lost his patience and said, "I command you to stay in Ayodhyā and assume all power in your hands irrespective of me".

‡ *Ibid* : II. 30.

नयिष्यसे नैव वनं मां समां सुखदुःखयोः ।

विप्रमद्यैव पास्यामि मा वशं द्विषतां गमम् ॥

The *Tilaka* :— द्विषतां भस्तादीनामित्यर्थः ।

Why was Ūrmilā left behind ? The poets have one and all waxed eloquent over Sītā, but are unaccountably silent about her. They have, so to say, cut her dead for no fault of hers. She was not a whit inferior to Sītā in the intensity of her love and devotion to her husband. Her soul must have struggled as wildly as Sītā's for permission to accompany him. She must have expressed her wishes as earnestly as Bharata, Kausalyā, and Guha did. She must have uttered the same threat of suicide. But like theirs, her argument could only be sentimental. Hence like them, Rāma dissuaded her also from her resolve to follow him, along with Lakshmaṇa, to the forest. He had allowed Lakshmaṇa to come along, not because he was also ordered into exile by Kaikeyī. She made no reference to him in her demands : for he was not a rival claimant to the throne; hence no thorn in the path of her son. Nor did he allow him to come along because of his unflinching devotion to him or even because of his threat of suicide. Bharata's self-surrender to Rāma stood even higher; still he was forcibly sent back to Ayodhyā, as his stay there was absolutely necessary in the interest of the whole kingdom. Rāma took Lakshmaṇa with him mainly to preclude the possibility of fratricide in the family, and secondly, in view of his potential usefulness in the task ahead. But though Lakshmaṇa accompanied Rāma in exile, he did not forfeit thereby his rights as a younger prince in the kingdom. He still retained them, and by virtue thereof Ūmilā could live honourably in Ayodhyā as the wife of a prince who went out as a volunteer in a noble spirit of self-sacri-

face. Sītā, on the other hand, could claim no place of honour in the kingdom, from where her husband was banished, with no vestige of property behind and with nothing but a void before him. In short, while Ūrmilā could hold her head erect, though staying behind Lakshmaṇa, Sītā would have to hide her face in shame, unless she followed in the footsteps of Rāma. As regards Kausalyā, she must stay where Daśaratha was, be the kingdom a heaven or a hell to her. As regards his friend Guha, he owed a duty to his family, which he could never be allowed to forsake on an impulse of sympathy with Rāma. Hence did our Rāma leave all others behind and took only Sītā and Lakshmaṇa with him.

CHAPTER IV

Behind the Scenes

George Bernard Shaw in his *Man of Destiny* has commented, in his usual incisive way, on the British policy of expansion and colonisation all the world over. He says :—

“Whenever the Englishman wants a new tract of land for his hungry brethren, he does not say that he wants it. He simply sends a missionary to teach the natives the gospel of peace, non-violence, and brotherhood. The missionary goes and builds a church there. Outwardly he spreads enlightenment, but inwardly he studies the environment, and gradually he brings over as many natives as possible into his fold in a mood of philanthropy. The natives smell a rat and rise against the missionary. Then the Englishman flies to arms in defence of suffering humanity and Christianity. He fights for it, he kills for it, he conquers for it, and finally he takes the whole region as a gift from heaven.

“No Englishman is too low to have scruples, or high enough to be free from their tyranny. But every Englishman is born with a certain miraculous power that makes him master of the world. When he wants a thing, he never tells

himself that he wants it. He waits patiently until there comes into his mind, no one knows how, a burning conviction, that it is his moral and religious duty to conquer those who possess the thing he wants. Then he becomes irresistible. Like the aristocrat, he does what pleases him and grabs what he covets. Like the shopkeeper, he pursues his purpose with the industry and steadfastness that come from strong religious conviction and deep sense of moral responsibility. He is never at a loss for an effective moral attitude. As the great champion of freedom and national independence, he conquers and annexes half the world, and calls it colonisation. In defence of his island shores, he puts a chaplain on board his ship; he nails a flag with a cross on it to his mast and sails to the ends of the earth, sinking, burning, and destroying all who dispute the empire of the seas with him.

“There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find Englishmen doing it. But you will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does every thing on principle. He fights you on patriotic principles; he enslaves you on imperial principles; he robs you on business principles; he bullies you on manly principles; he supports one king on loyal principles and cuts off another king's head on republican principles. His watchword is Duty; and he never forgets that the nation which lets its duty get on the opposite side to its interest is lost.”

The passage is peculiarly interesting; hence with slight omissions and alterations I have quoted it almost in full. But what Bernard Shaw calls an exclusively British policy has always been the Aryan way of conquest from time immemorial. This is amply borne out by several Brāhmanical legends. With our forefathers religion was not a means of attaining heaven beyond the clouds, but of creating one on earth; and a heaven on earth, as Kalidāsa aptly puts it, is a free, powerful, and prosperous kingdom.* In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1. 2. 5, we are told that :—

“When the Asuras thought that the world assuredly belonged to them alone, the gods placed Vishṇu in the shape of a sacrifice at their head and, having approached the Asuras, said that a part of this earth might be conceded to them for the purposes of a sacrifice. The Asuras, suspecting nothing, replied rather grudgingly that they would give them only as much as Vishṇu lay upon and nothing more. Now Vishṇu was a dwarf, but the gods were not offended by the smallness of the area measured out to them. They said joyfully that much indeed the Asuras had given them, who gave them what was equal in size to the sacrifice. Thereafter having enclosed the sacrifice on three sides and having placed Agni on the east side, they went on worshipping and toiling with it, and by it they obtained this entire earth. Therefore, the sacrificial ground is

* *Kālidāsa* : II. महीतलस्पर्शनमात्रमिन्नम् ऋद्धं हि राज्यं पदमैन्द्रमाहुः ॥

called *Vedi*, because the sovereignty of the world is obtained thereby, *Vidyate prāpyate anayā iti*. For this reason they say that as great as the *Vedi* or altar is, so great is the earth; for by means of this *Vedi* or altar they obtained this entire earth. And verily, he who understands this wrests likewise this entire earth from his rivals."

In the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, III.2.9, we have a similar legend that the gods, having been granted by the Asuras as much as they could enclose for their sacrifice, went on gradually pushing forward their enclosure and obtained the whole of this earth in the end. And I say, craving the reader's indulgence for the startling statement, that the conquest of the south by Rāma proceeded similarly on these very lines !

According to Vālmīki, Rāma spent about thirteen years of his exile in wandering amongst the different Brāhmanical settlements which were scattered all over the region between the Ganges and the Godāvarī. His wanderings extended from the hill of Chitrakūṭa in Bundelkhanda to the modern town of Nāsik near the sources of the Gadāvarī river. Having crossed the Ganges at Śrngavera, an important frontier town between the Rāj of Kośala and the country of the Bhils, he went in a south-easterly direction to the hermitage of Bharadwāja, which was situated at the junction of the two sacred rivers, the Ganges and the Jumna. From here he was directed to Chitrakūṭa, a celebrated hill, some sixty miles to the south of the Jumna. This was the seat of the inspired poet and sage Vālmīki who dwelt with

a number of disciples and led the same life of austerity, devotion, and sacrifice as Bharadwāja did at Prayāga. Here he intended to stay for some time and therefore put up, with the assistance of Lakshmaṇa, a cosy little cottage for the accommodation of the three. But after his meeting with Bharata the place acquired a publicity which left him no time for quiet meditation. Moreover, some faint-hearted hermits expressed apprehensions that the presence of Sītā among them might expose them all to constant trouble from the Rākshasas whose outposts were now reported to be within a few miles' distance of the place.* Rāma thereupon cut short his stay at Chitrakūṭa and set the fears of all at rest by himself moving southwards to the hermitage of Atri.

This hermitage was situated on the skirts of the notorious Daṇḍakā. Here poured in daily the horrid tales of atrocities committed by the Rākshasas on the Brahmin ascetics dwelling within. Atri, therefore, did not detain him long, but gave him leave to depart southward without delay and showed him the way to the hermitage of Śarabhaṅga. This sage was so worn out by the infirmities of age and the hardships of life in the very heart of Daṇḍakā that having at length been blessed with a sight of the young hero, whom only he had been yearning to see before closing his eyes, he had no longer any desire to live. He therefore begged of Rāma to let him make an offering of his body to the sacred fire in

* See pp. 49-50

his presence. But before he consigned himself to the flames, he implored Rāma to proceed straight to the hermitage of Sutikshṇa. From Sutikshṇa he gathered information about the exact location of the several penance-groves that lay in the secluded parts of this wilderness and were under the direct supervision of the sage Dharmabhṛta. These he visited in succession, sometimes abiding only a fortnight at one place, and sometimes as long as one full year at another place; sometimes two months, sometimes four months, sometimes six months, he remained in these penance-groves according to their respective importance. In this way passed away the ten years of his exile.*

Having completed his round of visits to the inner circle of the hermitages of Daṇḍakā, Rāma returned to Sutikshṇa, with whom he stayed for a considerable time.† Then he asked the sage to show

**Vālmīki* : III. 11.

मुनिं धर्मभूतं नाम प्रष्टुं समुपचक्रमे ।
जगाम चाश्रमांस्तेषां दण्डकारण्यवासिनाम् ।
क्वचित्परिदशान्मासान् एकसंवत्सरं क्वचित् ।
त्रीन् मासान् अष्टमासांश्च राघवो न्यवस्तुखम् ।
क्वचिच्च चतुरो मासान्पञ्च षट् च परान्क्वचित् ।
अपरत्राधिकान्मासान्ध्यर्धमधिकं क्वचित् ।
तत्र संवत्सतस्तस्य ययुः संवत्सरा दश ॥

†*Vālmīki* : III. 11.

सुतीक्ष्णस्याश्रमपदं पुनरेव जगाम ह ।
तत्रापि न्यवसद्रामः किञ्चित्कालमरिंदमः ॥

him the way to the hermitage of Agastya. This was some thirty-two miles further south in close vicinity to the source of the Godāvarī. Here he was presented with a sword of the finest temper, two quivers that carried an inexhaustible stock of arrows, and a bow shooting with an automatic string—a new mechanical invention of Agastya's.* Having stayed a few days with this sage, he moved to Panchavaṭī, a beautiful spot on the river Godāvarī, well-supplied with water and wood, and abounding in fruits and flowers. On his way to this place he had a chance encounter with one Jatāyus the Vulture, so nicknamed on account of his rapacious tendencies. He was obviously an outlaw of the Robin Hood type, at enmity with the rich and powerful Rākshasas, but in sympathy with the poor and helpless Aryans. He offered his friendship to Rāma, which Rāma gratefully accepted.† This was the first of many alliances formed by Rāma in his southward career—an alliance which was of immense use to him. It kept him fully informed of the enemy's movements and helped him to identify the abductor of Sitā. When the trio arrived at Panchavaṭī, Lakshmaṇa built for their abode a large hut on a raised floor of

* *Ibid* : III. 12.

इदं दिव्यं महच्चापं तूणी चाक्षय्यसायकौ ।
संपूर्णौ निशितैर्बाणैरसिर्हेमविभूषितः ।
अनेन धनुषा विष्णुराजहार पुरा श्रियम् ।
जयाय प्रतिगृह्णीष्व वज्रं वज्रधरो यथा ॥

† *Ibid* : III. 14.

जटायुरिति मां विद्धि संपातिश्च ममाग्रजः ।
सोऽहं वाससहायस्ते भविष्यामि यदीच्छसि ।
सीतां च तात रक्षिष्ये त्वयि याते सलक्ष्मणे ॥

earth, with firm posts of bamboos wrought together with wicker work, roofed with branches of trees, thatched with grass and leaves, and containing one room specially reserved for Rāma himself. Thus ended the first thirteen years of exile and thereafter began the real drama itself.*

In the foregoing narrative one point that awakens great curiosity and calls for critical enquiry is the appearance of Brāhmanical hermitages far to the south of the Rāj of Kośala, in a notoriously unhealthy, unsafe, and unfriendly country. If the aim of these Brahmin ascetics was only to practise religious austerities and meditations, then certainly they need not have come to the south at all. In the north itself there were many sacred rivers,† countless holy places, and not a few peaceful retreats, where they could keep their sacrificial Fires ablaze and lead an ideal life of enlightenment undisturbed, unhindered, and unmolested. There stood towering before them the Himalayas, the favourite abode of the gods, rich in sacrificial material, and diffusing spiritual influence all around, where the earlier sages had lived in tune

* The *Padma* :— तत्र त्रयोदशाब्दानि रामस्य अतिचक्रमुः ।
ततः शूर्पणखा नाम भेजे तं रावणानुजा ॥

† *Rg-veda* : X 75. 5. इमं मे गंगे यमुने सरस्वति
शुतुद्रि स्तोमं सचता परुण्या ।
असिकन्या मरुद्वुधे वितस्तया
५५ जीर्णीये शृणुह्या सुषोमया ॥

i. e. O ye rivers swelling in monsoon, you Ganges, Jumna and Saraswati, you Sutlej with Ravi, Chenab and Jehlam, you Bias with Indus, may you hear and accept this prayer of mine !

with the Infinite.* There lay Kailāsa, and Mānasa-Sarovara too, most suited to the contemplation of the Sublime, the Beautiful, the True.† Where was then the necessity for these sages to turn their backs upon this land of milk and honey, and bend their steps towards the dreary waste beyond the Vindhya range? Why did they transgress the command of their own law-giver Manu, namely, that the twice-born shall, at all events, keep within the four corners of Āryāvarta? Why did they first take a leap in the dark with their eyes open and then raise a shout for help with their mouths awry?

Secondly, in the previous portion of the Rāmāyaṇa there is no mention anywhere of Rāma's having met any of these sages before. Nor could the news of the unexpected happenings at Ayodhyā have reached them before the arrival of Rāma; for he is said to have left the city the very day he received the orders to quit, to have crossed the Ganges in three days and reached Chitrakūṭa in two days, thus covering a distance of two hundred miles in five days; nor the hermitages in Daṇḍakā were so easily accessible that the ease-loving people of the north would ever take the trouble of ranging over the forest merely to gossip with those whom they

* The *Kumāra* : I.

अस्त्युत्तरस्यां दिशि देवतात्मा हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः ।

... ..

यज्ञांगयोनित्वमेवेक्ष्य यस्य सारं धरित्री धरणक्षमं च ।

प्रजापतिः कल्पितयज्ञभागं शैलाधिपत्यं स्वयमन्वतिष्ठत् ॥

† *Vālmiki* : I. 24. कैलासपर्वते राम मनसा निर्मितं सरः ।

ब्रह्मणा नरशार्दूल तेनेदं मानसं सरः ॥

did not know at all. Yet nowhere does Rāma come as a stranger. Everywhere he is welcomed as a person well acquainted before and long expected to arrive.* None of the hermits ever refer to the sudden, unforeseen turn of affairs in Kośala, or sympathise with him in his loss of the throne, or express any regret at his banishment from the kingdom, or even praise him for his refusal to accept the Rāj from the hands of Bharata, as if all these events were already anticipated by them and therefore were too stale to bear talking over.† By every one he is hailed as the hero true to his word, the deliverer of humanity, the future conqueror of Rāvaṇa.‡ Some gave him, on account of their long experience of

* *Vālmīki* : III. 12 ततोऽगस्त्य उपश्रुत्य रामं वचनमब्रवीत् ।
दिष्ट्या रामश्चिरस्याद्य द्रष्टुं मां समुपागतः ॥

The *Adhyātma* : III. 3.

त्वदागमनमेवाहं प्रतीक्षन्समवस्थितः ।
भूमेर्भारापनुत्यर्थं रावणस्य वधाय च ।
वसामि मुनिभिः सार्धं त्वामेव परिचिन्तयन् ।

† *Vālmīki* : II. 55 भरद्वाजोऽब्रवीद्वाक्यमुपविष्टं रघूत्तमम् ।
चिरस्य खलु काकुत्स्थ पद्माम्यहमुपागतम् ॥

The *Adhyātma* : II. 6

ज्ञातं राम तवोदन्तं भूतं चागामिकं च यत् ।
यदर्थं वनवासस्ते यत्करिष्यसि वै पुनः ।
इतः परं किं वक्ष्ये त्वां कृतार्थोऽहं रघूत्तम ॥

Ibid : II. 6.

वाल्मीकिं राघवः प्राह दण्डकानागता वयम् ।
यतो भवन्तो जानन्ति किं वक्ष्यामोऽत्र कारणम् ॥

‡ *Vālmīki* : III. 7. रामं सुतीक्ष्णो बाहुभ्यां समाश्लिष्येदमब्रवीत् ।
स्वागतं ते नरश्रेष्ठ राम सत्यभृतां वर ।
विश्रुतस्त्रिषु लोकेषु विक्रमेण भविष्यसि ॥

forest life, the knowledge of edible roots and fruits to allay the torments of hunger and thirst; some informed him about medicinal herbs that cured illness or healed wounds caused by thorns, insects, and weapons; some initiated him into the mysteries of new missiles invented by them; some assured him that his quiver would remain inexhaustible, that is, he would regularly be supplied with everything necessary for the execution of his task. Thus though these hermitages were in appearance places of spiritual contemplation, sacrificial performance, and religious worship, yet in reality they were the hidden workshops, arsenals, and depots, from which supplies came to him continuously throughout his one year's eventful career in the south, beginning with his first few skirmishes on the enemy's frontier upto his final decisive battle in the enemy's capital. Indeed, in his rapid march from the river Godāvārī to the southern seas his mighty bow never wanted a string, nor his two quivers a deadly shaft !

Thirdly, with the exception of the six or seven principal sages, the rest of the hermits* throughout

* *Vālmiki* : II & III.

मुनिसंघैः समागम्य वागियं समुदाहृता ।
 बहुविधं तपो नित्यं संवासोऽपि च दुर्वहः ।
 होमकाले तु संप्राप्ते धर्षिता राक्षसैर्वयम् ।
 उच्छिष्टं वा प्रमत्तं वा तापसं ब्रह्मचारिणम् ।
 अदन्ति राक्षसा नित्यं वनेऽस्मिन्कामरूपिणः ।
 एवं वयं न मृष्यामो विप्रकारं तपस्विनाम् ।
 परिपाल्य नः सर्वान् शरण्यं त्वामुपस्थिताः ॥

उच्छिष्टं = One who having lost his way has strayed alone from the rest. प्रमत्तं = One who is off his guard.

his successive sojourns with them kept continually dinning into his ears how their altars were being defiled, their homes being destroyed and their brethren being decoyed to death by the Rākshasas; in short, how their stay in Daṇḍakā was getting altogether unbearable. They also showed him the skulls and bones of ascetics who were waylaid and slain, when straying alone a little too far, or moving about off their guard.* Rama lent a sympathetic ear to their wailings, but beyond giving verbal assurances that all would be set right in due time he did nothing.† It is indeed significant that in these thirteen years he never once in their defence or on their behalf bent his bow or drew his sword against the emissaries, snipers, and frontier guards of Rāvaṇa, who were responsible for the daily, cold-blooded slaughter of pious hermits. The orthodox poets say that he had no justification to lose his temper with the Rākshasas until he had lost his Sītā to them !‡ This, I say, is the grossest misrepresenta-

* The *Adhyātma* : III. 2.

ऋषीणामस्थिभूतानि शरीराणि शिरांसि वै ।
राक्षसैर्भक्षितानीश प्रमत्तानां समाधितः ।
अन्तरायं मुनीनां ते पश्यन्तोऽनुचरन्ति हि ॥

† *Vālmiki* : III. 6.

केवलेन स्वकार्येण प्रविष्टोऽहं महावनम् ।
तपस्विनां रणे शत्रून् हन्तुमिच्छामि राक्षसान् ।
पश्यन्तु वीर्यम् ऋषयः सिद्ध्यर्थमागतस्य मे ॥

‡ The *Adhyātma* : VII.

मयि विष्णुर्यथा कुप्येत्तथा कार्यं करोम्यहम् ।
इति निश्चित्य वैदेहीं जहार विपिनेऽसुरः ॥

tion of Rāma. Indeed, to look on quietly while hundreds are falling victims to wanton cruelty and to make a stir only when one's wife is rapped is certainly not heroism, but sheer instinct of revenge which the brutes share in common with us. The true explanation of Rāma's inaction is that he did not wish to open fire, until he was sure that the fire could be maintained to an increasing pitch till the last moment. The struggle with Rāvaṇa was bound to be titanic; hence the preparation therefor had to be gigantic. Till it was complete, Rāma avoided all encounter with the Rākshasas. Indeed until the huge machinery was well set up, it was foolish to start the engine. During these thirteen years he did not once disclose his true character to them. He successfully deluded them into a belief that he was only a harmless, homeless wanderer, frequenting hermitages for food and shelter, more an object of pity than a portent of disaster. In this long period they are nowhere spoken of as coming in his way or doing him the slightest mischief, with the exception of one Virādha on the very threshold of Daṇḍakā, whom he is said to have strangled to death and then carefully buried deep underground so as to leave no trace of this solitary ugly affair.* This fact has been

* *Vālmiki* : III. 4.

तत्स्थौ विराधमाक्रम्य कण्ठे पादेन वीर्यवान् ।

अखनत्पाश्वर्तस्तस्य लक्ष्मणः श्वभ्रमुत्तमम् ।

ततस्तु मुक्तकण्ठं तं समुत्क्षिप्याक्षिपद्ब्रिले ॥

श्वभ्रमुत्तमं — a spacious hole for receiving a corpse.

acknowledged by Sītā herself* :—

“These Rākshasas have so far done you no harm. Then, my dear, why do you meditate the destruction of these who are without enmity towards you”.

It is also significant that the principal sages did never speak of their troubles to him or hurry-harry him to precipitate action. Though they loved him intensely, yet they did not detain him for more than a couple of days, but sent him forward to visit every nook and corner of Daṇḍakā personally. They were his guides. They knew him and he knew them, and both knew the difficulty of the task ahead, the necessity of self-restraint, and the danger of an initial false step.

I am of opinion that when Viśvāmitra took Rāma round the hermitages on the Ganges, his main object was to bring him into contact with these Brahmin sages† who, like himself, were both warriors

* *Vālmiki* : III. 9.

बुद्धिर्वैरं विना हन्तुं राक्षसान्दण्डकाश्रितान् ।
न कथञ्चन सा कार्या गृहीतधनुषा त्वया ।
अपराधं विना हन्तुं लोको वीर न मंस्यते ॥

† Hence says Bharadvāja, ‘Welcome to you, O Rama ! It is long since I saw you last.’

Cf. *Vālmiki* : II. 54. चिरस्य खलु काकुत्स्थ पश्याम्यहमुपागतम् ॥

On this the *Tilaka* remarks :—

अनेन पूर्वमपि कदाचिद् आगमनं ध्वनितम् ।

Agastya also says, ‘We are well known to each other. I have been waiting for you all these years and looking forward to the destruction of Rāvapa.’

Cf. The *Adhyātma* : III. 3. quoted before.

and saints, and who, like modern scientists and explorers, lived in solitude and pursued their respective branches of knowledge patiently in spite of constant annoyance from the far-flung military outposts of Rāvaṇa. Impressed by their bold spirit, and by their genius for discovery and invention, Rāma must have talked over his scheme of conquest with them and solicited their co-operation. And it is in accordance with a carefully formulated plan that these sages, headed by Agastya and followed by several hermits, penetrated deep southwards in spite of great hazards and established colonies through the wilderness of Daṇḍakā upto the northern bank of the Godāvārī. This river bordered on Janasthāna, the flat rich contry of the modern Maharashtra, and formed the northern frontier of the empire of Rāvaṇa. These sages could have entered the south from the north-east through Orissa and by the southern coast. But this route was circuitous and swampy; hence they chose the shorter way across the Vindhya and Satpura ranges. This mountainous region was till then considered dangerous, unsafe, and almost insurmountable. But Agastya was not a man to shrink from difficulties. He inspired confidence in his followers and guided them skilfully across this un-negotiable tract. He humbled the pride of the Vindhyas and earned a conspicuous place among the stars of the southern hemisphere.* He was the first

* *The Brahma Purāṇa* :

अगस्त्यो दक्षिणामाशामाश्रित्य नमसि स्थितः ।
निर्जितानेन मुनिना दुर्धर्षा दक्षिणा हि दिक् ॥

and foremost pioneer of Aryan settlement in the south and took a principal part in the civilisation of the people there; hence he is regarded to this day as the first teacher of science and literature to the primitive Dravidian tribes. It speaks highly of his intrepidity that he chose for his Āśrama a site close to Janasthāna.

The Rākshasas naturally hated the sight of these adventurous Brahmins so near their empire and therefore sought to oust them by intimidation, molestation, and even by assassination. This is the explanation of the skeletons which Rāma saw bleaching here and there in Daṇḍakā. The early pioneers, therefore, were often required to bend their bow in self-defence. Experience of fighting against heavy odds led to the marvellous improvement of this weapon, and Agastya is said to have invented a bow which could shoot much farther, quicker, and with deadlier effect. In mythology he is represented as unsurpassed in the science of archery. He gave Rāma, in addition to his newly perfected bow, two quivers of wonderful capacity and a sword of durable edge. Viśvāmitra had already trained him in the art of war and taught him the use of several missiles.* Now he learnt from Agastya the ways

* *Vālmīki* : I. 27.

दण्डचक्रं महद्व्यं तव दास्यामि राघव ।
 धर्मचक्रं ततो वीर कालचक्रं तथैव च ।
 विष्णुचक्रं तथात्युग्रमैन्द्रं चक्रं तथैव च ।
 गान्धर्वमस्त्रं दयितं मोहनं नाम नामतः ।

(Continued on next page)

of Rākshasa fighting, the power and range of their weapons. And as he looked at the bow of this sage, it seemed to him almost divine; for while it kept him out of the range of his enemies, whatever their number, it brought them helplessly within his range. Thus equipped, enlightened and confident, Rāma took up his abode at Panchavaṭī in the beginning of the fourteenth year of exile and in full view of his future enemies, to all appearances a hermit devoted to the pleasures of solitude, but in reality a hero hiding his own light and waiting for something handy to turn up.

If Rāma succeeded in his gigantic task, half the credit goes to these much maligned Brahmin sages who, in a spirit of self-sacrifice, had infiltrated before him into the wilderness of Daṇḍakāranya and who, working silently, had prepared the ground for him. Hence says Sītā :—

“When the bow of the Kshatriya and the altar of the Brahmin come together, i. e. when the martial valour of the former and the spiritual fire of the latter work conjointly, there is

(Continued from the previous page)

प्रस्वापनं प्रशमनं दक्षि सौम्यं च राघव ।

वर्षणं शोषणं चैव संतापनविलापने ।

आग्नेयमस्त्रं वायव्यं ब्राह्ममस्त्रमनुत्तमम् ।

वारुणं कालपाशं च क्रौंचमस्त्रं तथैव च ।

ददौ रामाय सुप्रीतो मन्त्रग्राममनुत्तमम् ॥

produced from their combination a mighty flame of power and energy.* ”

Living in the most uncongenial surroundings, ever subject to privations, always open to the attacks of wild beasts, poisonous reptiles, and jungle fevers, continually harassed by the spies and soldiers of Rāvaṇa—these Brahmins held on as martyrs to a noble cause, and in full faith that their sufferings would not go in vain, but would bear fruit on the arrival of Rāma. The Adhyātma tells us that when the gods heard about the coming installation of Rāma, they became extremely uneasy and sent Nārada to remind him of the promise he had made to them. Who are these gods ? None else but these very Brahmin sages, who in Sanskrit are regularly called *Bhūdevas*, the gods on earth. It is they who were smitten with anxiety when the rumour floated to them that Rāma was about to accept the reins of Government from his father. It is they who sent him a courier secretly with a message that he must on no account swerve from his original intentions.† When

* *Vālmiki* : III. 9.

क्षत्रियाणामिह धनुर्हुताशस्येन्धनानि च ।
समीपतः स्थितं तेजो बलमुच्छ्रियते भृशम् ॥

† The *Adhyātma* : II. 1.

यदि राज्याभिसंसक्तो रावणं न हनिष्यसि ।
तत्सत्यं कुरु राजेन्द्र प्रतिज्ञातं पुरा त्वया ।
श्रुत्वैतद्गदितं रामो नारदं प्राह सस्मितम् ।
प्रतिज्ञातं च यत्पूर्वं करिष्ये तन्नसंशयः ।
रावणस्य विनाशार्थं श्वो गन्ता दण्डकावनम् ॥

the desired assurance was brought to them by Nārada, they felt greatly relieved at heart; and when he actually appeared before them, they fell into his arms and wept for joy. Indeed, some of them, like Śarabhaṅga, had suffered so much that, somehow holding their body and soul together, they only waited for his arrival. And when he at last arrived, they feasted their hungry eyes upon his face that reflected the gratitude of his heroic heart. Thereafter they communicated to him all the valuable information they had collected at a terrible cost,* and then sought, on the funeral pyre, final release from all those ills which their flesh could no longer endure.†

The first thirteen years of his exile were spent by Rāma among these Brahmin sages, not in enjoying their hospitality, but in listening to their experiences, in receiving instructions from them, and in coordinating their activities. About the aims and objects of his preparations there was maintained so close a secrecy that even Sītā was puzzled at the contrast between his garb as an ascetic and his conduct as a militarist. It is apparent from her admonition to him that he had not made her privy to his design. She says :—

* Ibid : III. 2. अद्य मत्तपसा सिद्धं यत्पुण्यं बहु विद्यते ।
तत्सर्वं तव दास्यामि ततो मुक्तिं व्रजाम्यहम् ॥

† *Vālmiki* : III. 5.

जहामि जीर्णगात्राणि मुहूर्तं पश्य तात माम् ।
इत्युक्त्वा शरभंगोऽसौ प्रविवेश हुताशनम् ॥

“I do not like this coming of yours to Daṇḍakā, armed with a bow and arrows; for, you have actually engaged yourself to compass the extermination of the Rākshasas who bear no malice towards you. This intention of yours to commit violence in the absence of personal enmity is certainly reprehensible. It belies your pious appearance. Cast away, my dear, this weapon of yours; for its very possession has a strange effect on the mind. It turns a man into a brute. Once upon a time Indra entrusted his scimitar to a devotee. The devotee always carried it as a sacred trust. Its constant association produced in him a desire to use it. This desire grew to a passion in course of time. And then it is the scimitar that possessed him. The more blood he shed, the more he wanted to. In this way by the blood-stained path he went straight to hell. If you say that as a Kshatriya it is your duty to protect the good and punish the wicked, I say that this duty does not belong to a Kshatriya who has chosen to lead a life of renunciation and piety. You may claim it as your duty when you go back to the world and hold the sceptre in hand. But till then, friends and foes are alike to you. Remember, my dear, that as long as you wear matted hair and bark garments, you ought not to wish injury to any

fellow-creature. Be true to yourself, my dear, and let your present dress be the badge of spiritual elevation and not the cloak of blood-thirsty ambition.”*

The reply of Rāma was rather dialectical and dogmatic than logical and convincing. He says :—

“Change of dress, my darling, does not mean change of character. Though I may be a devotee, yet I do not cease to be a Kshatriya. As a man of the warrior caste, it is my inborn duty to promise protection against the evil-doers. And as a man of the religious order, it is my sacred duty to keep that promise. These hermits have chosen to take refuge with me against the

1 *Vālmiki* : III. 9.

तव बाणधनुष्पाणेर्गमनं दण्डकान् प्रति ।
 न हि मे रोचते वीर कारणं तत्र श्रूयताम् ।
 क्व च शस्त्रं क्व च वनं क्व च क्षात्रं तपः क्व च ।
 व्याविद्धमिदमस्माभिर्देशधर्मस्तु पूज्यताम् ।
 कदर्यकलुषा बुद्धिर्जायते शस्त्रसेवनात् ।
 अग्निसंयोगवद्धेतुः शस्त्रसंयोग उच्यते ।
 प्रतिज्ञातस्त्वया वीर वधः संप्रति रक्षसाम् ।
 निर्वैरं क्रियते मोहाद् यच्च प्राणाभिर्हिसनम् ।
 तृतीयं तदिदं रौद्रं व्यसनं ते ह्युपस्थितम् ।
 पुरा न्यस्तो महेन्द्रेण खड्गो मुनिसमीपतः ।
 न स याति विना खड्गं न्यासरक्षणतत्परः ।
 नित्यं शस्त्रं परिवहन् क्रमेण स तपोधनः ।
 चकार रौद्रीं स्वां बुद्धिं त्यक्त्वा तपसि निश्चयम् ।
 तस्य शस्त्रस्य संवासाज्जगाम नरकं मुनिः ।
 तस्मात्तु शस्त्रं संन्यस्य भवेत्स्त्वं निरतो मुनिः ।
 पुनर्गत्वा त्वयोध्यायां क्षत्रधर्मं चरिष्यसि ॥

Rākshasas. Now it will neither be manly nor saintly to withdraw my support and let them down. You are my companion in homely virtues, my honey, but not my guide in practical politics. Leave this sphere entirely to me. Remember once for all that I shall relinquish life, even you, and Lakshmaṇa too; but having once plighted my promise to these Brahmin sages, I will not fail in my duty to protect them at all cost.”*

This interesting conversation took place before Rāma entered the borderland of Janasthāna, where Rāvaṇa had stationed a large army under the command of his two cousins, Khara and Dūshāṇa, the Wardens of the marches.† It was here that Rāma made his first appearance before the footlights of the world-stage and became the centre of attraction. Let, therefore, the curtain now go up and the *Leela of Rāma* begin.

* *Vālmīki* : III. 10.

सधर्मचारिणी त्वं मे प्राणेभ्योऽपि गरीयसी ।
मम स्नेहाच्च सौहार्दादिदमुक्तं त्वया वचः ।
तथापि क्षत्रियैश्चापो धारणीयोऽन्यरक्षणे ।
ऋषीणां दण्डकारण्ये संश्रुतं परिपालनम् ।
संश्रुत्य चान्यथा कर्तुं न शक्यामि प्रतिश्रवम् ।
अप्यहं जीवितं जह्यां त्वां वा सीते सलक्ष्मणाम् ।
न तु प्रतिज्ञां संश्रुत्य ब्राह्मणेभ्यो विशेषतः ॥

† *Vālmīki* : VII. 24.

आजगाम खरः शूरो दण्डकान्परिरक्षितुम् ।
दूषणो वै बलाध्यक्षो बभूवास्य महाबलः ॥

CHAPTER V

The Curtain Rises

The disguise of Rāma as an ascetic was well-supported by his rejection of the Rāj at Chitrakūṭa. Bharata had earnestly offered the crown to him, but he had publicly refused it of him. Naturally such a person, who was altogether indifferent to the Royal Fortune at home, could hardly be suspected of coveting another's sovereignty abroad. Therefore, when Rāma stepped into the hostile territory clothed in garments of bark, crowned with a spiral mass of twisted hair, subsisting on wild fruits and roots, and practising silently the vow of renunciation which the many preach eloquently to others, none could have the slightest inkling of his real intentions.* His magnetic personality, his bewitching smile, his mellifluous tongue spread a web of enchantment wherever he went, so that whosoever came into his presence was charmed and impressed. Even

* The *Adhyāṭma* : III.

मुनिवेषधरो रामो जटामुकुटमण्डितः ।

फलमूलकृताहारो भूशायी वल्कलांबरः ॥

Śūrpaṇakhā, sister of Rāvaṇa, was so fascinated that she offered her own hand to him.* But Rāma had gone to the south to shed the blood of Rāvaṇa, not to contract blood-relationship with him. Being a diplomat, he did not say no to her flatly, and still avoided saying yes definitely. He only gave her equivocal replies, which raised false hopes in her and set her a dancing about him, much to the amusement of others.

The question that needs careful consideration here is, what was the motive of Rāma in tantalising Śūrpaṇakhā with vague assurances which he never meant to fulfil? Several poets seem to imply that his object was simply to expose her to ridicule and seek for himself some comic relief at her expense from the dreary monotony of life. This explanation I reject as derogatory to Rāma. In this apparently frivolous affair, or as you might call it a game of flirtation, there was a much deeper meaning than mere idle amusement. It must be borne in mind that Śūrpaṇakhā was the sister of Rāvaṇa, and as such she had intimate knowledge of his private life, his household, his relations with his sons and brothers. This knowledge was indispensable to him for the purpose of sowing the seeds of dissension in the enemy's camp. As Manu puts it :

* Ibid : III. 5. कन्दर्पसदृशाकारं स्मयमानांबुजेक्षणम् ।

दृष्ट्वा तं राक्षसेन्द्रस्य भगिनी काममोहिता ॥

Also *Vālmiki* : III. 17.

समुपेतास्मि भावेन भर्तारं त्वां नरोत्तमम् ।

चिराय भव भर्ता मे, सीतया किं करिष्यसि ॥

‘Let him, intent upon conquest, first ascertain which on the side of his enemy are at heart inclined to treachery and therefore susceptible to temptation. Let him then win them over by secret negotiations, and through them keep himself informed of the enemy’s doings.*’

This secret information he could never draw out of her by snub or rebuff, but only by humouring her to the top of her bent. Flattered by his attentions, she revealed to him the ins and outs of his future enemy. From her he learnt that Indrajit was a chip of the old block in bravery and leadership, that Kumbhakarna, though doughty, was habitually drunk and rarely awake, that Vibhishana, though sanctimonious in form, was really envious at heart†; for Ravana himself spoke of him as follows :—

“I know it, my dear sneak, that you cannot bear to see that I should command the homage of the world, and rise to universal sovereignty,

* *Manu* : VII. 197. Kullūka’s comment :—

उपजाप्यान् उपजपेद् बुध्येतैव च तत्कृतम् ।
युक्ते च दैवे बुध्येत जयप्रेप्सुरपेतभीः ॥

जयेप्सुः राज्यार्थिनः रिपुवन्द्यान् उपजापसहान्, क्षुब्धान् अमात्यादींश्च ज्ञात्वा भेदयेत् । एवं वशीकृतानां तेषां द्वारा शत्रुचेष्टां च जानीयात् इत्यर्थः ।

† *Vālmiki* : III. 17.

रावणो नाम मे भ्राता यदि ते श्रोत्रमागतः ।
तस्यैष इन्द्रजित्नाम पितृतुल्योऽधिकोऽपि वा ।
प्रवृद्धनिद्रश्च सदा कुम्भकर्णो महाबलः ।
विभीषणस्तु धर्मात्मा न तु राक्षसचेष्टितः ॥

and walk over the heads of my enemies.”*

This piece of information was precious, and Rāma treasured it in his mind and made the right use of it at the right time. When Hanūmān was sent over to Laṅkā, his real task there was not to trace the whereabouts of Sītā and warble into her ears the greetings of Rāma, but to have secret whisperings with Vibhīṣaṇa and ascertain the price at which he would be willing to sell himself, his honour, and his country. Hanūmān was a pastmaster in diplomacy; for Rāma speaks of him as follows†: —

“Look here, Lakshmaṇa, how charming is this man’s address and how adroitly he broaches a subject. He can disarm anybody’s fear or anger, and crack the hardest nut in no time. It is ambassadors like him who win political battles for their masters, before the military operations are actually under way.”

Hanūmān successfully broke the ice with Vibhīṣaṇa and eased the qualms of his conscience by dangling before him the prospect of coronation in the near

* *Valmiki* : VI. 16.

ततो नेष्टमिदं सौम्य यदहं लोकसंस्कृतः ।
ऐश्वर्यमभिजातश्च रिपूणां मूर्ध्नि च स्थितः ॥

† *Valmiki* : IV. 3.

उच्चारयति कल्याणीं वाचं हृदयहर्षिणीम् ।
कस्य नारोध्यते चित्तम् उद्यतासे रिपोरपि ।
एवंविधो यस्य दूतो भवेद्वै पार्थिवस्य तु ।
तस्य सिध्यन्ति सर्वे ऽर्था दूतवाक्यप्रचोदिताः ॥

future. He must have added weight to his negotiations by reference to the recent happenings at Kishkindhā; for when Vibhīshana alighted on the coast to meet Rāma, he said* :—

“Here comes Vibhīshana, my lord. Having heard from me how Vāli was quickly disposed of and Sugrīva installed in his place, he has come personally to bargain with you for the kingdom of Laṅkā. You will do well, my lord, to strike hands with him and retain him; for he will be a useful tool in our hand to break open the citadel of our enemy.”

Rāma promised Vibhīshana solemnly what he wanted to have, but on condition that he told him unreservedly what he wanted to know. The throne of Laṅkā was a bait too tempting to resist. Vibhīshana closed his jaws upon it greedily and was hooked. Thereafter, as he had a selfish interest in Rāma's victory, he helped him heart and soul in the successful conduct of the war, and with a vigilant eye warned him beforehand of several dangers which Rāma-himself could never have forestalled in time. In this way Vibhīshana worked in an exemplary manner for the destruction of his brother,—of Rāvaṇa who had raised his people from their long continued state of obscurity to such dazzling prosperity that there arose a saying that Laṅkā turned to gold at

1 *Ibid* : VI. 17. वालिनं च हतं श्रुत्वा सुग्रीवस्याभिषेचनम् ।

राज्यं प्रार्थयमानस्तु बुद्धिपूर्वमिहागतः ।

एतावत्तु पुरस्कृत्य वर्तते तस्य संग्रहः ॥

the touch of Rāvaṇa. In exchange for his brother's glorious independence Vibhīṣhaṇa accepted for himself inglorious vassalage. While Rāvaṇa lived, he had not to bend his head before anyone in the world, but after his death, he had to kiss the very feet of one who had trampled his brother in the dust. I do not understand why our poets should eulogise Vibhīṣhaṇa at all and call him magnanimous, virtuous, sublime in intellect, and disciplined in self,* who said unblushingly to Rāma† :—

“While life throbs in me, I shall help you unsparingly in destroying my countrymen, in storming my mother city, and in working insidiously through the gallant defenders of my native soil.”

We might as well praise Quisling for his loyal co-operation with Hitler, which made the conquest of Norway a child's play; or admire Meer Jafar for his secret dealings with Clive, which decided the future of Bengal before the battle was joined at Plassey ! Indeed, when Vibhīṣhaṇa was bought over by Hanūmān, the fate of Laṅkā was sealed before the deed was actually written out in blood on the stricken

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 19. विभीषणो महाप्राज्ञो धर्मात्मा विजितेन्द्रियः ॥

The *Adhyātma* : VI & VII.

विभीषणो बुद्धिमतां वरिष्ठः ॥

विभीषणो धर्मशीलः प्रजापतिरथाब्रवीत् ॥

† *Vālmiki* : VI. 19.

राक्षसानां वधे साह्यं लंकायाश्च प्रवर्षणे ।

करिष्यामि यथाप्राणं प्रवेक्ष्यामि च वाहिनीम् ।

field. Rāvaṇa had seen through his brother, for he says to him* :—

“I am not afraid of fire and sword, but of treachery from my own relatives who, I know, for a paltry gain, will not hesitate to play into the hands of my enemy.”

But instead of putting him in chains, Rāvaṇa allowed him to slip through his fingers. He realised the gravity of his mistake some time later, but it was then too late to mend.

Let us now return to Śūrpaṇakhā whom we left dancing attendance upon Rāma. Having wormed out of her all the family secrets of Rāvaṇa, he told her ruefully that as he was a monogamist, he could not marry her while his beloved spouse lived.† She was then directed to go to Lakshmaṇa, but he gloried in abject slavery to Rāma; therefore to be his wife was rather undignifying.‡ Naturally she cast her evil eyes upon Sītā whom she now hated with the bitterness of disappointed love. Why, she said, should this hussy stand between herself and her lover ? She was a thorn in her way and must be

* *Ibid* : VI. 16. नाग्निर्नान्यानि शस्त्राणि न नः पाशा भयावहाः ।
 घोराः स्वार्थप्रयुक्तास्तु ज्ञातयो मे भयावहाः ।
 उपायमेते वक्ष्यन्ति ग्रहणे नात्र संशयः ।
 कृत्स्नाद्भयाद् ज्ञातिभयं सुकष्टं विदितं च नः ॥

† *Valmiki* : III. 18.

कृतदारो ऽस्मि भवति भार्येयं दयिता मम ।

‡ *Ibid* : III. 18. कथं दासस्य मे भार्या दासी भवितुमिच्छसि ।

rooted out as such. In her hysterical mood, born of passionate despair, she made an attempt on the life of Sitā. Lakshmaṇa, who always remained on the watch, caught her in the act, and being by nature a Hotspur, he inflicted upon her face a horrid disfigurement which, though bravo'd by the poets and applauded by their readers, can hardly be set down to the credit of any man, much less to the honour of a chivalrous hero. Rāma could hardly have ordered this barbarous act, though the poets say so;* for he himself warned Lakshmaṇa in these words :—

‘Take your hands off and let her go. Practical jokes should be avoided, especially with Non-Aryans who are peculiarly unforgiving.’†

Thus ended the opening scene with Śūrpaṇakhā. Rāma was fully alive to the fact that Lakshmaṇa had in his rashness sown the wind and that he would now have to reap the whirlwind. His predictions proved true. Khara and Dūshana, brothers of Śūrpaṇakhā, vowed revenge and, holding Rāma cheap, first sent a posse of policemen to catch him, then platoon after platoon of soldiers to kill him. But both the police and the soldiery, coming in a careless, disorderly way, dissolved into a rabble rout before his quick-shooting bow. In this way

* The *Adhyātma* ; III. 5.

ततो रामाज्ञया नासां कर्णौ चिच्छेद लक्ष्मणः ।

† *Valmiki* : III. 18.

निगृह्य रामः कुपितस्ततो लक्ष्मणमब्रवीत् ।
ऋरैरनार्यैर्नो कार्यः परिहासः कथंचन ॥

the effectiveness of Agastya's new contrivance was conclusively proved.* Then there followed a spell of calm. A report reached him that Śūrpanakhā had gone personally to Rāvaṇa. Serious developments were apprehended by many. But the only 'tit' that Rāma anticipated for his 'tat' from Rāvaṇa was the abduction of Sitā. He was perfectly right in assuming that Rāvaṇa would not be so foolish as to declare war upon a homeless wanderer, and for the sake of a sister who was a disgrace to his family for running after an Aryan vagabond, and who had now no face to show in the world for her notorious attempt at murder. He, therefore, concluded that Rāvaṇa's retaliation would fall in a line with the conventions of his time—tooth for tooth, eye for eye, blood for blood, and woman for woman ! The life and honour of Sitā thus seemed to him to be in imminent danger. Should he make his escape in good time, or resign himself to fate ? None of these two courses appealed to him. He had come purposely to pit himself against

* *Vālmiki* : III. 25.

शूलमुद्गरहस्ताश्च पाशहस्ता महाबलाः ।
 राममेवान्यधावन्त सालतालशिलायुधाः ।
 ततः शरसहस्राणि निर्ययुश्चापमण्डलात् ।
 नाददानं शरान्वोरान् विमुञ्चन्तं शरोत्तमान् ।
 विकर्षमाणं पश्यन्ति राक्षसास्ते शरादिताः ॥

i. e. The Rakshasas came upon him in strength, some wielding spears, clubs and nooses, others hurling rocks and stocks. Then from his large bow flew forth thousands of arrows, so thick and fast that they neither saw him taking them from his quiver, nor fixing them to the string, nor even pulling the string—all the three actions happening automatically.

his wily enemy. To reel back now would be sheer cowardice; to sit idle, an egregious folly. He must stay where he was and save her from the intended outrage of the enemy, and yet make her the cause of a righteous war with him ! The plan whereby he succeeded in achieving these two contrary objects was a masterstroke of genius. Indeed, he ate the bread to his fill and yet had it intact in his hand.

What was this plan ? Tulasidāsa,* who draws

* The *Rāmācharita* : III.

लछिमनु गये वनहिं जब लेन मूल फल कंद ।

जनकसुता सन बोलेउ बिहँसि कृपा-मुख-वृंद ॥

सुनहु प्रिया व्रत रुचिर सुसील । मैं कछु करवि ललित नरलील ॥

तुम्ह पावक महुँ करहु निवासा । जौँ लगि करउँ निसा-चर-नासा ॥

जबहिं राम सबु कहा बखानी । प्रभुपद धरि हिय अनल समानी ॥

निज प्रतिविंब राखि तहँ सीता । तैसइ सील रूप सुबिनीता ॥

लछिमनहूँ यह मरमु न जाना । जो कछु चरित रचेउ भगवाना ॥

i. e. When Lakshmana had gone to the forest to collect roots and fruits, Rāma, smiling gracefully and at ease, said to the daughter of Janaka :— ‘Hearken, most lovely, amiable, and faithful of wives ! I am going to have a bit of fun and weave a delightful plot in keeping with my character as man. Do you enter the fire till I have completed the destruction of the Rakshasas.’ When Rāma had fully unfolded to her his plot, she pressed her Lord’s feet to her heart and entered the fire, leaving only an image of herself, exactly alike in appearance and gentle disposition. Even Lakshmana was not made privy to this secret.

cf. The *Ādhyātma* : the *Aranyakāṇḍa* ; chap. VII. Verses 1-4.

1. Now Rāma, having known all that Ravana intended to do, said to Sita as she was alone, “Hear, O Jānaki, what I say.”

(Continued on next page)

largely upon the Adhyātma, has indicated it in his own charming way, which I crave the indulgence of the reader to elaborate in a matter-of-fact language. One day when Lakshmaṇa had gone out to hunt, and Rāma was alone with Sītā in his woodland cottage, he took her into confidence and explained to her the great purpose of his life. He said :—

‘My dear, it is high time that Rāvaṇism must be eradicated from earth, and heaven has so willed it that I must undertake this great task. I have, therefore, to fight this arch-enemy of humanity and progress to the bitter end. But no Aryan ever commits the folly of starting a war with another without first creating a cause to justify it. His wisdom lies in this that he first

(Continued from the previous page)

2. “Rāvaṇa shall come to thee in the guise of a mendicant. Do thou enter the cottage, having placed a shadow of thyself outside.”
3. “Do thou live in the fire unseen by my order for a year. After Rāvaṇa has been killed, thou shalt, O good lady, come to me as before.”
4. Upon this, having placed an illusive Sītā outside, the real Sītā entered the fire.

अथ रामोऽपि तत्सर्वं ज्ञात्वा रावणचेष्टितम् ।
 उवाच सीतामेकान्ते शृणु जानकि मे वचः ।
 रावणो भिक्षुरूपेण आगमिष्यति तेऽन्तिकम् ।
 त्वं तु छायां तदाकारां स्थापयित्वोदजे विश ।
 अग्नावदृश्यरूपेण वर्षं तिष्ठ ममाज्ञया ।
 रावणस्य वधान्ते मां पूर्ववत्प्राप्स्यसे शुभे ॥
 श्रुत्वा रामोदितं वक्त्रं स्मरति तत्र तथाकरोत् ।
 मायासीतां बहिः स्थाप्य स्वयमन्तर्दधेऽनले ॥

indirectly provokes the enemy to fury; and when the enemy has been successfully thrown off his balance into a false step, he quietly lets him stagger from one error to another until he stands totally in the wrong. Then does the Aryan hero come into the open and call upon the whole world to witness and support his righteous struggle in the cause of truth and justice. You already know how Rāvaṇa has been rubbed the wrong way by us : his sister has lost her face, and therefore he is sure to carry you off to spite my face. Caution demands that you should now vanish from the eyes of the world and remain in hiding till the war with Rāvaṇa is over. From now on it is your double who will stay with me as Sītā. It is this false Sītā whom Rāvaṇa will carry off trickily—to my dishonour in name but to his own discomfiture in fact. All the same it will give me a solid ground to take a hostile stand and commence my war of right against his might in right earnest.'

Who was this double ? Both the Adhyātma and Tulasi mean to suggest that she was either the tangible shadow of Sītā or the mental creation of Rāma. But since I have discarded miracles as such, I am inclined to the view that it was Śabarī who played the role of Sītā, after Sītā was concealed in a safe place. We are told in the Rāmāyaṇa that Rāma appreciated her platonic love for him so highly that when she offered her partially tasted fruits to him, he ate them with pleasure, though Lakshmaṇa

spurned them in disgust.* Such partaking of food, which has previously touched the mouth of a woman, has a peculiar significance in Hindu society. It means the merging of two souls into one. Among certain sections of the Hindus when a man has eaten from the same plate with a maiden, their marriage is said to be cemented. Rāma had met several devotees before on his way, but nowhere did he accept food from the mouth of anyone of them. Then why did he make an exception in the case of Śabarī ? She loved him ardently. So did Śūrpanakhā too. But there was a radical difference between the two. The love of Śūrpanakhā was of the nature of a carnal passion, sordid and mean; that of Śabarī, of the spiritual type, pure and sublime.

Her long contact with the sages of Daṇḍakāraṇya had vastly improved her mind. She understood the greatness of Rāma and his work. She admired him as the worthiest of the worthy and fixed her affections upon him for the realisation of her higher self, not for the gratification of sensual appetites. The *Padma Purāṇa* tells us that after eating her

* The *Padma* : फलानि च सुपक्वानि मूलानि मधुराणि च ।
स्वयमास्वाद्य माधुर्यं परीक्ष्य परिभक्ष्य च ।
पश्चान्निवेद्यामास राघवाम्भ्यां दृढव्रता ।
फलान्यास्वाद्य काकुत्स्थस्तस्यै मुक्तिं परां ददौ ॥

i. e. Having tested the sweetness of each ripe fruit or root by first tasting it herself, Śabarī offered it to Rāma with true devotion. Having eaten such fruits and roots, Rāma set her free from the shackles of low birth and gave her an abode of bliss.

uchchhishta, Rāma gave her *mukti*. This literally means that he absorbed her into himself and made her a part of his Being. To put it in a matter-of-fact language, her existence as Śabarī ceased on that day. She became a part of himself, his partner in the work he had undertaken. In other words, she identified herself with his other half and appeared thereafter as Sītā by his side. This view is supported by another account in the *Adhyātma*. There we are told that when Rāma had finished eating, he discoursed with her at length on the various forms of devotion. To dedicate one's life and person to the cause of God was one of them. She chose this form of worship and placed herself, body and all, at his disposal. He accepted her offer of her own self to his cause. He called her his own, made her his confidante in the scheme of conquest, and gave her a place by his side as Sītā.

The question that I anticipate here is, how could Śabarī, a dark-coloured woman of the jungle, ever impersonate Sītā, a fair-bodied princess of the palace? It does not seem unlikely in view of what Rāma himself says about Sītā at Panchavatī* :—

“Look here, Lakshmaṇa. Our Sītā is so darkened by constant exposure to the sun that while her form is recognisable, her beauty is entirely missing.”

* *Vālmiki* : *HL*. 16.

ज्योत्स्ना तुषारमलिना पौर्णमास्यां न राजते ।
सीतेव चातपश्यामा लक्ष्यते न च शोभते ॥

This is Vālmiki's account, and what he says is in accordance with the laws of Nature. He further tells us* :—

“At the time of leaving Ayodhyā, Rāma said to Sītā, ‘My dear, part now with these jewels and silks of yours. Adopt a plain dress befitting our forest life.’ He then called the son of Vasishṭha and said to him, ‘Sir, my Sītā gives you today her bracelets and armlets; also her pearl necklace, her golden chain, and her jewelled girdle. Please take them to your wife.’ When Sītā put on a garment of bark, she looked like a female mendicant unaccustomed to ascetic life.”

This is what Vālmiki says and what he says accords well with the fitness of things. But his editors and interpolators, as also the later poets who sang in their tune, thought otherwise and put in everywhere, irrespective of all considerations, florid descriptions of Sītā's charms, decorations, and garments, possibly because they could not explain otherwise why Rāvaṇa should have gone mad after her. Thus they say :—

* *Vālmiki* : II. 30, 32, 38.

आरभस्व शुभश्रोणि वनवासक्षमाः क्रियाः ।
 भूषणानि महार्हाणि वरवस्त्राणि यानि च ।
 देहि ब्राह्मणवर्गस्य क्रीडार्थंश्चाप्युपस्कराः ।
 सुयज्ञं स तदोवाच रामः सीताप्रचोदितः ।
 अंगदानि च चित्राणि केयूराणि शुभानि च ।
 द्वारं च हेमसूत्रं च रत्नैश्च रशनां तथा ।
 प्रयच्छति सखी तुभ्यं भार्यायै गच्छती वनम् ।
 आसाद्य चीरं संजाता विसंज्ञा श्रमणीव सा ॥

‘There, in the leafy hut, the lord of Laṅkā saw her wearing a yellow garment of silk, her complexion dazzling like molten gold, her face shining like the full moon, her breasts sparkling with a profusion of jewels, her nails glistening red and full, and her lips tinged with rosy hue.’*

They further say that :—

“When she was being carried through the air by Rāvaṇa, her ornaments blazed forth like fire and fell, with a jingling noise, to the ground like meteors from the sky.”†

These flights of imagination betray utter disregard of time, place, and character. Such descriptions might apply to a princess living in a palace, amid pomp and splendour, in comfort and luxury, but never to the wife of an ascetic trudging through the dreary forest. Indeed, after thirteen years of hard, irregular life, moving constantly on foot, now in the scorching sun, now in the biting cold, now in the torrents of rain, how could her body retain the

* *Vālmiki* III. 46.

आसीनां पर्णशालायां पीतकौशेयवासिनीम् ।
तप्तकांचनवर्णाभां रत्नतुंगनखीं शुभाम् ।
मणिप्रवेकाभरणां पीनोन्नतपयोधराम् ।
सीतां रुचिरदन्तोष्ठीं दृष्टवान् राक्षसाधिपः ।
अभ्यगच्छत वैदेहीं पूर्णचन्द्रनिभाननाम् ॥

† *Ibid* : III. 52. सीतामादाय चाकाशं प्रययौ राक्षसाधिपः ।
तस्यास्तान्यग्निवर्णानि भूषणानि महीतले ।
सद्योषाण्यवशीर्यन्त क्षीणास्तारा इवांबरात् ।
हारः स्तनान्तराद्भ्रष्टो नूपुरं चरणात्तथा ॥

lustre of liquid gold, or her face bloom like a full-blown rose ? The laws of Nature, set in motion by the Almighty, would not lapse in her favour ! Secondly, it casts a slur upon Sītā to say that having once adopted a pair of bark-garments to share the ascetic life of Rāma, she changed to silken robes and blazed forth with anklets and armlets, girdles and ear-rings, pearl necklaces and crest-jewels, as if to make herself presentable to Rāvaṇa ! Nor did she carry a toilette box with her to dress her hair smooth and glossy, and to paint her lips and nails red. The glowing description of her charms and decorations must therefore be rejected as an interpolation in bad taste. Thus my assertion stands that as Sītā, according to the testimony of Rāma, had grown swarthy in thirteen years of exile and was ill-clad, unkempt, and unembellished, it was not impossible for Śabarī to impersonate her. Moreover, in order to effect in her a passable resemblance to Sītā, Rāma may have employed some of the processes of metamorphosis, which Chāṇakya describes in his Arthaśāstra and which are largely in use in the political world of to-day : Hitler is said to have had four doubles to represent him on several occasions.

Lakshmaṇa, kept purposely in the dark by Rāma,* did not notice the substitution of Śabarī in place of Sītā, because as he was constitutionally shy of women, his gaze did not travel beyond their

* The reasons are discussed fully in the last chapter.

toes.* Ravana could have no suspicion at the time of carrying her off, because he had never seen her before, nor had he the time then to examine whether Śabarī answered to a T the description he had heard of Sītā. Moreover, my contention is that in carrying off Sītā, the motive of Ravana was not lust for beauty, but thirst for revenge. In support I refer to the *Adhyātma* which pays this compliment to Ravana that he always treated Sītā, during her captivity, with as much consideration and regard as if she were his own mother.† In direct opposition to this, several poets and dramatists have, as downright propagandists, put horrid threats and passionate

* *Valmiki* : IV. 6.

नाहं जानामि केयूरे नाहं जानामि कुण्डले ।

नृपुरे त्वभिजानामि नित्यं पादाभिवन्दनात् ॥

Here Lakshmana says :— “I do not know whether these armlets and ear-rings belong to Sītā or not. All that I can vouch for is that these anklets are hers : my sight has grown familiar with them owing to constant salutations to her feet.”

† The *Adhyātma* : VII. 4.

मातृवत्पालयामास सोऽपहृत्यावनीसुताम् ॥

N. B. Besides representing Sītā to be a paragon of feminine charms, the poets have also represented her to be in budding youth at the time of her abduction. This is another silly mistake. She was 18 at the time of her marriage, then lived for 12 years in Ayodhyā, afterwards passed 13 years in Daṇḍakāraṇya before she came to Panchavaṭī, and there she was for 6 months before Ravana came in. Thus she was on the wrong side of forty-three at the time of her abduction. In India a woman at 44 is not in the morning but in the evening of youth. If Ravana carried off Sītā in her declining age, his motive can hardly be said to be amorous !

speeches into the mouth of Rāvaṇa in regard to Sītā, so as to represent him a monster of vice and cruelty. So was Napoleon painted an ogre in England, and Hitler, a ferocious beast ! All the same, this fact is acknowledged by all that Rāvaṇa did no harm to Sītā. He could have mutilated her as Lakshmaṇa did Śūrpaṇakhā, or have committed rape upon her as Indra did upon Ahalyā. But he did nothing of the kind.* The poets are hard put to it to reconcile this moral restraint of his with their description of him as a gross libertine. As a last resort, they have invented a story that he was by certain celestial damsels forbidden on pain of death to violate any woman.† Curse or no curse, the fact remains undisputed that though Rāvaṇa carried off Sītā, he did nothing dishonourable to her. And why ?

In this connection there is a beautiful story. It is widely popular in the Mahārāshṭra, though its source is not traceable. Since it shows a keen insight into the character of Rāvaṇa and fully elucidates

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 84.

अभिप्रायं तु जानामि रावणस्य दुरात्मनः ।
सीतां प्रति महाबाहो न च घातं करिष्यति ॥

Here Vibhīṣhaṇa assures Rāma that though Rāvaṇa might be wicked, yet his heart towards Sītā was pure and that he would do no violence to her.

† *Ibid* : VII. 26.

यदा ह्यकामां कामार्तो धर्षयिष्यति योषितम् †
मूर्धा तु सप्तधा तस्य शकलीभविता तदा ।
श्रुत्वा तु स दशग्रीवस्तं शार्प रोमहर्षणम् ।
नारीषु मैथुनीभावं नाकामास्वभ्यरोचयत् ॥

the above quotations from the Adhyātma and Vālmiki, I should like to narrate it here in full. When Indrajit, the last hope of Rāvaṇa, was slain in the fight, Mandodari was convulsed with grief. Weeping bitterly, she scolded Rāvaṇa outright for the calamity he had brought upon himself, his family, and his empire for the sake of Sītā. She said :—

‘Send away that witch at once. Ever since she came here, our luck has been down. Bad omens attended her arrival and carried in their train worse misfortunes. What have we not lost by now ? Everything. Still there is your precious life. Save it for my sake, O save it ! I implore you with folded hands. End this war, my lord, restore Sītā to Rāma and make peace with him.’

On hearing these words Rāvaṇa smiled sadly and said :—

“With all my sympathies in your sorrows, my dear, I pity your abysmal ignorance. The cause of the present struggle lies much deeper than you think. The abduction of Sītā is only a pretext for it.* This war is fought to settle once for all the question of Aryan or Non-Aryan ascendancy on earth. That is the main issue involved. The two races have been at clash of arms over this question for hundreds of years

* Just as the murder of the Austrian Prince at Serajevo was only a pretext for the Great War of 1914-1918. In the Adhyātma, Rāma says that he will make Sītā a pretext for the destruction of the entire Rākshasa race. cf. II. 1. 39.

in the past with varying fortunes. And to-day you are witnessing the final phase of that struggle. Whosoever wins now will stand supreme, or sink for ever if he fails. I had realised my ambition of world sovereignty. But victorious everywhere from the beginning, I was intoxicated with pride, with the result that now, driven into a tight corner, I find myself fighting at bay. Having beaten the Aryans flat on the face, I took no further notice of them. I underrated their genius for machinations. When Rāma made his initial moves, I was so drunk with the idea of invincibility that I did not care to see their ultimate end. When there grew up a network of hermitages on the very borders of my empire, I did not wake up. When there was a *coup d'état* in Kishkindhā, Vāli going down to the grave and Sugrīva coming to the throne with magic suddenness, I did not open my eyes. When Hanūmān came and went, buying over my brother and leaving my Laṅkā in the hidden flames of treason, I yawned a little but slept over it. When the enemy crossed over to my island over-night and hemmed me in on all sides, I was startled out of my drowsiness, but then I found to my horror that there was no room left for me to move my hands and feet. That very instant I saw plainly the ruin of me, my family, and my race.

You ask me why I brought Sītā at all. I admit it has been an egregious folly, though I must say it did not so look then. You already know how our Śūrpaṇakhā was brutally disfigured.

Whatever her faults, she was after all my sister. I had to vindicate my honour, if not hers. I played the game of tit for tat laughingly, but soon after I had to laugh on the wrong side of my face. Rāma had already anticipated my move. Having placed a counterfeit in my hand, he laughed in his sleeve and grew maudlin over his pretended loss. On that very pretext he ranged over my empire, shedding copious tears of melancholy and shooting secret arrows of diplomacy at the same time. In this way my power was gradually soaked to softness and perforated with holes. I was the mightiest of the mighty. But I depended entirely on the might of my sword and belittled the power of intellect. And Rāma, the cleverest of the clever, hit me where I was weakest. He was born to save his race, as I to exalt mine. Our methods differed. He has succeeded, whereas I have failed. But we understand each other and admire each other's greatness. There is no personal enmity between us. If there were, it would have been settled by a duel, as in the case of Vāli. But Rāma did not seek the death of Rāvaṇa only. He aimed at *Rāvaṇism* which is innate in our race and which flares up every now and then. He has already started sucking up that spirit. Witness the defection of Vibhīṣaṇa, which is the first of its kind in the history of our race. Now, by and by, our race will be absorbed in the other race. The very name Rākshasa will disappear from earth. That end cannot now be averted, even if I submit.

Then, tell me, why should I bend my head before those whom I trampled before under my foot ? Let my body and spirit perish in heroic independence rather than pickle for ever in shameful submission. To convince you that I have no real Sītā with me and that Rāma bears no personal grudge to me, I shall invite him and Śankara with their wives to dinner tomorrow. Do the cooking yourself and maintain absolute secrecy."

Mandodarī was speechless with surprise on hearing these words. She arranged everything as she was told. At the appointed hour came the distinguished guests. But Rāma came alone. As the table was set for six, one seat remained vacant. Rāvaṇa said that the meal would not begin until Sītā came to take her seat. Thereupon Rāma replied to him naively that as she was in his captivity, the matter rested entirely with him. Upon this Rāvaṇa turned red in the face and said :—

"Can you not, Rāma, lay aside for a while your theatrical attitude and meet me with an open heart ? Here we are not at the chess-board of diplomacy, but at the festive board of fellowship. Do not for a moment think that I have not seen through your game. I know who is in Aśokavana. She is free. I have not put her behind the bars or in chains. Hanūmān could have carried her as secretly as he met her stealthily. But you did not want it. You purposely wanted her to remain here as the outward cause of the present Armageddon. She has truly served your

purpose, though false. But why should I call her false, when the fruit she has borne you is so sweet, to me so bitter ? By her you have deceived the world into a belief that the war you have been waging with me is one of righteousness against wickedness, though the truth is, as you already know, that from beginning to end it has been on your part a war of insidious infiltration, uncalled-for provocation, and downright aggression. However, let us not turn this friendly affair into an acrimonious debate. The dinner is waiting. Please bring your Sītā. I do not mean any harm to her, nor do I pine for her. I am supremely happy with my Mandodarī and my heart does not hanker after another's wife."

Thereupon Rāma brought his Sītā in Pushpaka aerial car and then the dinner began. When it was over they both embraced each other. Rāvaṇa said :—

"Tomorrow we meet again as enemies on the battle-field. I have no delusions in my mind as to the end of this war. Your victory is certain. But remember while life flickers in me, you will not have it cheap."*

Thus ends this beautiful story. It unfolds the nature of Rāma-Rāvaṇa-struggle, throws light on the character of Rāvaṇa, and stresses the point we are considering, namely, that whom Rāvaṇa carried off was not the real Sītā but only her counterpart. On this point the Adhyātma, Tulasi, and the Padma Purāṇa are at one. I have already given my reasons why I am inclined to honour Śabarī with that

* This story reminds one of Scott's *Talisman*.

important role. Both Vālmīki and Vyāsa say that her ultimate end was self-immolation on a burning pyre.* But they do not explain why she should burn herself to death immediately after receiving instructions in the various forms of devotion. It looks so absurd that she should first solicit enlightenment on the path of devotion and thereafter, having been told by Rāma to dedicate herself entirely to him,† should do nothing else but light a fire and throw herself lightly into it. She was young; for in the *Adhyātma*, Rāma calls her *bhāminī*, which, in Sanskrit, is a term of endearment in addressing a young loving woman. It is inconceivable that Rāma, the man of action, would ever permit a young woman, who was spiritually devoted to him, to commit suicide unnecessarily before his very eyes. I am therefore of opinion that a period of one year elapsed between her meeting with Rāma and her disappearance in the fire. The events that happened in this interval, though attributed to Sītā, really happened to her. If this view is accepted, then two questions are satisfactorily solved; firstly, why there was a fire-ordeal in Laṅkā, but none in Ayodhyā in spite of the sameness of circumstances in both places; secondly, why Śabarī

* *Vālmīki* : III. 74.

अनुज्ञाता तु रामेण हुत्वात्मानं हुताशने ।
ज्वलत्पावकसंकाशा स्वर्गमेव जगाम सा ॥

† The *Adhyātma* III. 10.

शबरी प्राञ्जलिः प्राह किं करोमि प्रसीद मे ।
तस्मान्द्रामिनि संक्षेपाद्वक्ष्येऽहं भक्तिसाधनम् ।
भक्तिः संजायते प्रेमलक्षणा शुभलक्षणे ।
यस्मान्मद्भक्तियुक्ता त्वं ततोऽहं त्वामुपस्थितः

requested Rāma to allow her to pass away in a blaze of glory.*

With the death of Rāvaṇa her role as Sītā also came to an end. It was obvious that real Sītā would now emerge from her concealment and take her legitimate place by the side of her husband. If Śabarī thereafter continued to pose as Sītā, she would be hooted out as a mad woman. Nor could she continue to stay with Rāma as Śabarī; for she was *adhamajāti*, a woman of the lowest caste, an untouchable. Thus the only course left open to her was to go back to her old home and take her place again among the outcasts of society. This was, indeed, 'a consummation not to be devoutly wished for.' As one poet rightly observes† :—

“How could she who had once occupied the position of a queen ever like to be enrolled in the menial staff ! A marble once inscribed with the form of a deity does not deserve to be used as a pebble in the pavement.”

Hence when Rāma was compelled to put Sītā to the test of fire to convince the people of Laṅkā that she was pure in mind and body,‡ Śabarī offered herself

* Ibid : III. 10. सुहूर्तं तिष्ठ यास्यामि यावद् दग्ध्वा कलेवरम् ॥

† Anonymous : देवीभावं गमिता परिवारपदं कथं भजत्येषा ।
न खलु परिभोगयोग्यं दैवतरूपांकितं रत्नम् ॥

‡ The *Adhyātma* : VI. 13.

राघवस्य मतं ज्ञात्वा लक्ष्मणोऽपि तदैव हि ।
विद्वांसार्थं च रामस्य लोकानां प्रत्ययाय च ।
महाकाष्ठचयं कृत्वा ज्वालयामास पावकम् ॥

willingly to undergo the ordeal,* so that Sitā might be saved from the flames and live thereafter happily with Rāma as a woman whose character was attested by the gods ! Indeed, Śabarī loved Rāma spiritually and sacrificed herself for the sake of his wife, as Sydney Carton, in Dickens' Tale of Two Cities, loved Lucy ideally and sacrificed himself for the sake of her husband ! The part played by her was so important and her sacrifice so noble that the poets feared lest she, a woman of the despicable class, should eclipse Sitā altogether. Therefore they purposely killed her immediately after meeting Rāma and placed this meeting after the abduction of Sitā. Some even represented her as an old hag, *vrddhā*, so as to obliterate all trace of her important role. It is only the *Adhyātma* which, while suppressing the truth to honour the prejudices of its time, yet gives a glimpse of it, as is evident from the quotations given in the foot-notes.

The prevailing opinion that Sitā walked through the fire unscathed is absolutely wrong. Vālmiki says† :—

“Then the gods and sages saw her falling

* The *Adhyātma* : III. 10.

अहमग्निं प्रवेक्ष्यामि तवाग्रे रघुनन्दन ।
इति रामं समामन्त्र्य प्रविवेश हुताशनम् ।
प्रसन्नाऽधमजन्माऽपि शत्रुरी मुक्तिमाप सा ॥

† *Vālmiki* : VI. 116.

ददृशुस्तां महाभागां पतन्तीं हव्यवाहनम् ।
ऋषयो देवगन्धर्वा यज्ञे पूर्णाहुतीमिव ।
शप्तां पतन्तीं निरये त्रिदिवाद् देवतामिव ॥

into the fire ablaze; like a generous offering of butter, poured into the sacrificial fire and becoming one column of flame; like a deity hurled from heaven by a curse and consumed in the fires of hell."

The *Kūrma Purāṇa* says* :—

"For the sake of convincing all living beings, the illusory Sītā entered the blazing fire, and the fire also burned her up."

Tulasi says† :—

"The living image of Sītā and the stigma cast upon her name by the world were both consumed in the terrific fire. The gods, men, and sages looked on, but none knew the hidden secret of Rāma."

Valmīki further says‡:—

"At the sight of that burning form, the mind of Rāma was suffused with gloom and his

* The *Kūrma*, quoted in the *Tilaka* on III. 45. 37, says :—

सा प्रत्ययाय भूतानां सीता मायामयी पुनः ।
विवेश पावकं दीप्तं ददाह ज्वलनोऽपि ताम् ॥

† *Tulasi* : VII. प्रतिविम्ब और लौकिक कलंक,
प्रचण्ड पावक में जरे ।

प्रभुचरित काहु न जान लेहु,
सुर-नर-मुनि देखत खरे ॥

‡ *Valmīki* : VI. 118.

तस्यामग्निं विशन्त्यां तु हाहेति विपुलः स्वनः ।
ततो हि दुर्मना रामो बाष्पन्याकुललोचनः ।
ततः श्रुत्वा शुभं वाक्यं पितामहसमीरितम् ।
अङ्गेनादाय वैदेहीं तथारूपामनिन्दिताम् ।
ददौ रामाय प्रत्यक्षमङ्कं कृत्वा विभावसुः ॥

eyes were filled with tears. Then at the request of the Creator, there came the god of fire in person, carrying the real and unblemished daughter of Janaka in his arms, and presented her to Rāma."

Thus from all these passages one thing is clear that whosoever the *māyāmayī* or *pratibimbā* may be, she was burnt first and then the *tathārūpā* Sītā was brought before all by one who called himself Agni, but had a human form. Now I again repeat that the so called illusory Sītā was Śabarī who is said to have died, according to every poet, voluntarily in a blazing fire before the eyes of Rāma. I differ from these poets only in one respect, namely, that whereas they all make out that Śabarī died in a fire unnecessarily just after meeting Rāma near Panchavaṭī, I, on the contrary, hold that she made a generous sacrifice of herself for the sake of Sītā in the fire ordeal at Laṅkā one year after. If what was burnt by Rāma in Laṅkā was a mere phantom or a shadow or an hallucination, it is impossible to understand why, at its vanishing in the fire, his grief should be of such a type as to cause agitation in heaven. But if we take it that it was Śabarī who died magnanimously for Sītā and out of platonic love for him, then it is easy to understand why his heart should melt with sorrow and his eyes burst into tears. It also explains away the apparent inconsistency in his conduct at Laṅkā and at Ayodhyā. In Laṅkā he set at rest the suspicions of his enemies and accepted Sītā; in Ayodhyā he submitted to the suspicions of his own people and abandoned Sītā !

Indeed in Ayodhyā his heart shuddered at the idea of testing his innocent spouse in the flames, because he did not expect her to come out alive and unhurt. Rāma had no more faith in the fire-ordeal as a test of moral purity than we have today, and he had as much faith in the inexorability of Nature's laws as we have now. Indeed, if moral purity could alter the laws of the physical universe, then Jesus Christ would never have bled to death, when he was nailed to the cross by the Jews to test his godliness; then Socrates and Mīrābāī, too, would not have turned their eyes white, when a glass of poison was poured down their throat to test their goodness !

Having discussed the Sītā-Śabarī question in detail, we now return to the point from which we digressed. In anticipation of Rāvaṇa's move Rāma hid away his Sītā somewhere in the maze of Daṇḍakāranya hermitages and left her under the protection of the sages who were ever willing to brave any danger to further his design. Thereafter he resumed his usual life at his cottage *with Śabarī as his helpmate in the future dramatic developments*. Before long, according to expectations, came Rāvaṇa, or more likely his agents, on the prowl. Rāma allowed himself to be lured away by the trick of a golden deer. Śabarī, growing suddenly wild, raved madly at Lakshmaṇa and forced him to leave the premises.* The prowlers found the coast clear and carried off their prey without let or hindrance. On the way they had a sharp encounter with Jatāyus who,

* This interesting topic is discussed in the last chapter.

true to his words, fought desperately to rescue his friend's wife until he fell bleeding profusely to the ground. Rāma, in his frantic search for the missing Sitā, found him at his last gasp, waiting only to make his report. Somehow he whispered a few words and died with a happy feeling that he had done his duty.

Thereafter started the masterly propaganda of Rāma to enlist the sympathies of the southerners for himself and create public opinion against Rāvaṇa. He pretended stark madness through grief and went about addressing birds, embracing creepers, and asking trees where his sweet little darling was.* An object of pity to all in the south, a prince once but stripped of everything before by his cruel step-mother and now robbed of his only solace by their despotic monarch, he went from place to place, unsuspected and unchallenged, shedding copious tears, heaving long sighs, and uttering doleful cries. In the *Adhyātma*, Rāma says† :—

“If I sit at home nursing my grief silently,
how can I find out the ways and means of exter-

* *Vālmiki* : III. 60.

मृगाश्च पक्षिणो वृक्षा दर्शयन्तु मम प्रियाम् ।
पृच्छन्मामो वने भ्रान्त उन्मत्त इव लक्ष्यते ॥

† The *Adhyātma* : III. 8.

यद्यहं विरतो भूत्वा तूष्णीं स्थास्यामि मन्दिरे ।
तदा राक्षसकोटीनां वधोपायः कथं भवेत् ।
यदि शोचामि तां दुःखसंतप्तः कामुको यथा ।
तदा क्रमेणानुचिन्वन् सीतां यास्येऽसुरालयम् ।
एवं हृष्टोऽप्यन्वशोचताम् अचलोऽप्यनुभावति ॥

minating the Rākshasa race? But if, in a paroxysm of grief, I go about in quest of my Sītā, I may ultimately get an access to the very centre of my enemy's stronghold." Thus mightily pleased at heart, he bewailed her loss, and though firm in mind, he ran about in flurry.

In this way Rāma accomplished the moral and diplomatic conquest of the south simply by raining down tears. Nowadays the national leaders rain down pamphlets from the skies. The methods may differ, but the motive behind is just the same. However, the sympathy of the southerners was gained to such an extent that when the armies were raised in Kishkindhā for the invasion of the island, Rāma met with no obstruction anywhere and had a free passage to the sea. And when the battle was joined before the very walls of Rāvaṇa's capital, there was no serious attempt made from the mainland to attack Rāma in the rear, or even to cut off his retreat, and thus relieve the pressure on Rāvaṇa, the mighty emperor of the south.

CHAPTER VI

The Action Moves Forward

How to secure a powerful ally was the next question before Rāma—an ally who was thoroughly conversant with the terrain and had under him troops well trained for sea, mountain, and jungle warfare. There lay at this time near Mysore a small kingdom of Kishkindhā under the rule of Vāli the Fearless. The people of this place were renowned for their warlike spirit and love of independence. They had so far successfully resisted the rapacious soldiery of Rāvāṇa and given it a taste of defeat on more than one occasion. They were dwarfish in stature, but tough of body, with muscles of steel. They were remarkably swift and agile, with a dash of playful cunning in their nature. Their rare physical powers combined with curious intelligence, their instinct for organisation with a sense of discipline, their attachment to the native soil with unyielding assertion of their birth rights—all these qualities had made so deep an impression upon the Rākshasas that they called them half derisively and half admiringly the *Vānaras*, just as the Russians nicknamed the Japanese *monkeys* and the Mahomedans styled the

Mahrattas *rats*. Rāvaṇa had found it impossible to subjugate these people. He had several encounters with Vāli, but each time he was so adroitly tripped and finally so entrapped that he had to make peace with him on equal terms. He said* :—

“Wishing to hem you in, I came, O lord of the Vānaras, but have been hammered by you instead. I am pleased to find in you my match and should therefore like to be your sincere friend.”

In despair Rāvaṇa had to leave this kingdom alone and bypass it, when he extended his empire upto the Godāvārī and pushed his military outposts as far as the southern bank of the Ganges. What Rāvaṇa failed to achieve by the might of his sword, Rāma succeeded in gaining by the power of his tact. He got round these people so skilfully and handled them afterwards so lovingly, yet firmly, that they became the truest instruments of his policy. They toiled for him as labourers, worked for him as spies, acted for him as scouts, fought for him as warriors, and finally put the crown of victory on his head, and yet remained for ever his most loyal and devoted servants. Such was the spiritual force of Rāma, such the charm of his personality, and such the nature of his love, along with all his other traits as a political genius ! Vālmiki must have described these people exactly as they were. But when

* *Vālmiki* : VII. 34.

वानरेन्द्र महेन्द्राम राक्षसेन्द्रोऽस्मि रावणः ।
युद्धेप्सुरिह संप्राप्तः स चाद्यासादितस्त्वया ।
त्वया सह चिरं सख्यमिच्छामि पावकाग्रतः ॥

the later bards enlarged upon his Epic, they could not resist the temptation to play upon the name *Vānaras* in order to tickle the fancy of their credulous hearers. They actually affixed a tail to their backs and made them jump from tree to tree, sometimes swinging head over heels and sometimes walking on all fours, while at the same time they narrated their manners and actions as human beings. They noticed the contradiction involved in their description, but they explained it away by saying that these *Vānaras* were the gods of heaven who had purposely taken this form on earth to assist Rāma, because Rāvaṇa, by virtue of his boon or curse, could be killed only by men in league with monkeys. We may not, for amusement's sake, take exception to this imagery based upon pun and its explanation based upon myth; for it is the poet's special privilege "to body forth the forms and shapes of things unknown." But when the poet descends from his airy height and comes to discuss seriously the questions of law and morality, as in the case of *Vāli-vadha*, it is highly objectionable on his part to mistake his own fancy for fact and declare always 'heads' for Rāma and 'tails' for Vāli, and thus make his argument-in-defence a mere tissue of childish fallacies.

However, there is time still to come to this part of our narrative. For the present we have to follow Rāma in his search for a suitable ally. When Rāma arrived on the borders of Kishkindhā, he found the affairs there in such a state that an outsider with brains might easily throw himself in and make himself virtually the master of the whole kingdom.

There had occurred an irreconcilable split between Vāli and his younger brother Sugrīva for the possession of the Rāj. Sugrīva, who had been plotting against his elder brother during the latter's campaigns abroad, had just been turned out of the realm disgracefully along with all his conspirators such as Hanūmān, Jāmbavān, Nala and Nīla. The tension between the two parties was on the increase and Rāma decided to turn it to his own advantage. Should he side with Vāli or with Sugrīva? The former course appeared attractive; for with the help of Vāli the conquest of Laṅkā would be a much easier affair. As Vāli himself says on his deathbed :—

“O Rāma, if you had confided your troubles to me and left the matter in my hand, I would have captured that Rāvaṇa alive on the battlefield and brought him to you, bound hand and foot.”*

Rāma knew full well that this was not a vain boast. But the shorter and easier way to victory was fraught with dangers which, as a farsighted politician, he could not ignore. There is an important rule in foreign politics that it is always risky to enter into an alliance with one who is likely to prove dictatorial in the end and feed you for ever with humble pie, and that it is safer to choose for an ally one who will remain under your obligation and play

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 17.

मामेव यदि पूर्वं त्वमेतदर्थमचोदयः ।
राक्षसं च दुरात्मानं तव भार्यापहारिणम् ।
कठे बद्ध्वा प्रदद्यां तेऽनिहतं रावणं रणे ॥

second fiddle to you. It is the neglect of this warning of political science which brought dire results to India in the past. The Mahrattas sought the help of the English in their quarrel with Tippu; the English destroyed the Tiger of Mysore and afterwards sat so tightly on the back of the Mahrattas that they were brought down to their knees in no time. Jaychand rushed to Mahomed Ghory against Prithwiraj; but no sooner was Prithwiraj taken captive than Jaychand was trussed up for the Grand Feast.

Rāma, of course, did not fall into this error for the sake of a short cut to victory. In weighing the advantages and disadvantages of an alliance with each of these two brothers, Rāma found that Vāli was notoriously arrogant and imperious; whereas Sugrīva was remarkably meek and submissive. Secondly, he had nothing substantial to offer to Vāli in return for his help; whereas to Sugrīva he could promise the throne of Kishkindhā. Thirdly, whereas Vāli needed nobody's protection against Sugrīva, Sugrīva was entirely helpless without Rāma, and Rāma could supply him the necessary brains to get rid of his brother in such a way that everyone, without suspecting foul play, should accept him as the next successor to the throne, in spite of there being Angada. Fourthly, both Rāma and Sugrīva were fellow-sufferers in respect of the loss of their thrones and the abduction of their wives; hence like birds of the same feather they were likely to fly together in full sympathy and perfect agreement. Therefore, a pact of life-long friendship was signed between the two, in which the terms were that

Rāma must fulfill his part of the contract first, i. e. place Sugrīva on the throne of Kishkindhā, and then Sugrīva should place his army and treasury at the disposal of Rāma.*

But how to get rid of Vāli was an exceedingly difficult problem. Open war with him was out of the question; for he was already so powerful that even if the two exiles attacked him in combination, he could shatter them to pieces in no time. In addition, Rāvaṇa was likely to join his forces with him in this war, as Rāma was the common enemy of both. This possibility could not be ruled out of consideration, though there was really no love lost between them. History furnishes several examples of how circumstances often make strange bedfellows in politics. Till 1940, Churchill and Stalin had done nothing else but scratch each other's face. But when Hitler, who had already fallen out with England, also fell foul of Russia, the two suddenly beamed and smiled, and never ceased hanging on each other's neck until the war was over, when again they bared their teeth and resumed their growling in right earnest. Rāma, therefore, had no other alternative but to plan the assassination of Vāli with a heavy heart, but none the less in a machiavellian manner. Those were the days of chivalry when personal disputes were often

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 7.

वाल्मिनं तं हनिष्यामि तव भार्यापहारिणम् ।
 किं तु यत्नस्त्वया कार्यो मैथिल्याः परिमार्गणे ।
 राक्षसस्य च संहारे रावणस्य दुरात्मनः ।
 एवमेकान्तसंपृक्तौ प्रोचतुर्नरवानरौ ॥

settled by the award of duels. Sugrīva had been branded as a usurper and robbed of his wife. On these two points he could demand satisfaction from Vāli.* Rāma therefore advised him to challenge his brother to a mortal combat in vindication of his honour, and to make it a condition that it should be fought outside the city, in a sequestered place, away from the eyes of the citizens who had nothing to do with this purely fraternal affair. Thereafter they all bent their steps quietly to the city of Kishkindhā and in the forest outside stood concealed behind the trees in a circle, while Sugrīva went alone to give his challenge to Vāli.†

Vāli had one great defect in him and this defect was born of consciousness of superstrength : he was willing to meet his rival at whatever time and on whatever ground he proposed. In short, he suffered from superiority complex like Afzul Khan, and like Afzul Khan he was lured into a death-trap. He was

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 8. to 14.

यतस्त्वं वालिना राज्यान्निर्धूतोऽसि बलीयसा ।
 हृता भार्यापि तेनैव क्षिप्रं गच्छ ततोऽग्रतः ।
 गत्वा चाह्वय सुग्रीव, तत्र शब्दं तथा कुरु ।
 निष्पतिष्यत्यसंगेन वाली स प्रियसंयुगः ॥

i. e. Since you have been banished from the kingdom and deprived of your wife by Vāli, you should go ahead and challenge him in such insulting terms that he, being sensitive and bellicose by nature, will rush out alone to fight with you, without any supporter to guard against foul play.

† *Vālmiki* : IV. 14.

सर्वे ते त्वरितं गत्वा किष्किन्धां वालिनः पुरीम् ।
 वृक्षैर्यत्मानमावृत्य व्यतिष्ठन्गहने वने ॥

a hero to the core, who never played others foul and never expected them to play him false. He went about the world unguarded, flinging all caution to the winds, and in this utter lack of circumspection lay the cause of his ghastly destruction. As Bhāravi puts it* :—

“Those simpletons are bound to go down in the world who have not learnt how to meet cunning with cunning, who go through life unwary and unarmed, thinking that they are proof against all harm.”

His wife Tārā, who had a bitter experience of Sugrīva during the absence of her husband, knew him to be a coward with a corrupt soul. She was naturally surprised to see that he, who never ventured to show his face to her husband, now vaunted openly to his face. She rightly suspected that some sinister force must be working secretly at his back to put this unnatural courage into his heart.† She was smitten with anxiety and warned her husband with tears in her eyes. But Vāli said‡ :—

* *Bhāravi* : I.

ब्रजन्ति ते मूढधियः पराभवं भवन्ति मायाविषु ये न मायिनः ।
प्रविश्य हि घ्नन्ति शठास्तथाविधानसंवृतांगान्निशिता शरा इव ॥

† *Vālmiki* : IV. 15.

नासहायमहं मन्ये सुग्रीवं तमिहागतम् ।
अवष्टब्धसहायश्च यमाश्रित्यैष गर्जति ॥

‡ *Vālmiki* : IV. 16.

सुग्रीवस्य च संरंभो हीनग्रीवस्य गर्जितम् ।
न च कार्यो विषादस्ते राघवं प्रति मत्कृते ।
धर्मज्ञश्च कृतज्ञश्च कथं पापं करिष्यति ॥

“Don’t worry, my dear. As regards Sugrīva, I can crush him like a fly between my two fingers. As regards Rāma, whom you suspect to be in unholy alliance with him, *I do not think that he will ever do any evil to me*; for I have heard that he is conversant with moral code and is upright in conduct.”

Indeed, he had too much charity in him to think of perfidy in others. He went alone with a firm step to the appointed spot, and while he was at close grips with his brother, Rāma shot an arrow callously from behind a tree, which tore open his noble heart and laid him flat on the ground, never to rise again !

In this way, contrary to all laws of sport and war, the death of Vāli was compassed. The deed having been done, the arrow which was the tangible evidence of a third party interference, was carefully hidden. Thereafter Rāma appeared before the people of Kishkindhā in his saintly garb and told them in his exquisitely convincing way that he had been accidentally present to witness the two brothers’ fight to the bitter end. He assured them upon his honour that Sugrīva had won fair and square, and that Vāli had fought bravely to the death. Howsoever much he regretted Vāli’s death, he could not help saying that possibly it was the life of dissipation he had been leading of late that had put him out of form; or rather it was his guilty conscience which had left his arm so weak. Whatever it might be, it was not his business to discuss. What he could say unhesitatingly as an eye-witness was that it was a clean fight, altogether above board. Who could disbelieve

the words of Rāma ? — of Rāma who lived in the odour of piety and was the spirit of renunciation incarnate. When the citizens were hypnotised, he assumed the role of a judge and declared authoritatively that as the throne of Kishkindhā was at stake in the fight, it must go to the victor for his life-time according to the law of duels, and as Aṅgada was the legitimate son of Vāli, heir-apparentcy must go to him according to the law of succession.* The decision proposed was indeed so clever that it satisfied both the parties concerned. The subjects must have hailed it as an excellent solution of the problem created by the rival claims of Sugrīva and Aṅgada. At any rate there is no hint in the Rāmāyaṇa anywhere that there were signs of uprising or even whispers of discontent among the people when Sugrīva ascended the throne in spite of Aṅgada's right to succeed his father.

Several poets and dramatists have unnecessarily attempted to justify this *Vāli-vadha* on moral grounds. The attempt is sheer nonsense. There could really be no moral justification for an act which was a deliberately planned murder. The plain truth is that it was for Rāma a dire political necessity, and without it he could never have moved even a step forward towards his ultimate goal. Hence the utmost

* *Vālmāki* : IV. 26.

सुग्रीवो विधिवद्वीरः क्षिप्रं राज्येऽभिषिच्यताम् ।

इममप्यङ्गदं वीरं यौवराज्येऽभिषेचय ।

ज्येष्ठस्य हि सुतो ज्येष्ठः सदृशो विक्रमेण च ।

अङ्गदोऽयमदीनात्मा यौवराज्यमतोऽर्हति ॥

that we can say in his favour is that the greatness of the object he had in view justified the baseness of the means he employed to achieve it. The defence that has been put into the mouth of Rāma by the subsequent editors of Vālmiki is exceedingly irritating and not in the least convincing. But since the Sanātānistis applaud it highly, it is worth while to examine it here in detail and see for ourselves whether the orthodox poets have done service or disservice to Rāma by waxing eloquent upon a point on which Vālmiki himself observed judicious silence. To start with, Rāma says :—

“I take this whole earth to belong to the family of Ikshvāku, of whom the present illustrious descendant is Bharata reigning at Ayodhyā. By his orders I have turned a knight-errant to punish the transgressors of law and morality, wherever they may be. Know that in slaying you stealthily, I have only carried out the instructions of my liege lord, Bharata.”*

The presumption here is worthy of the wolf in Æsop's Fables. So did Hitler rant that the entire world belonged to the German race and that he was entitled to trample under foot all those who committed the sin of embracing communism as their national policy. Besides, first to stab a man from

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 18.

इक्ष्वाकूणामियं भूमिः सशैलवनकानना ।
 भरतस्तु महीपालो वयं त्वादेशवर्तिनः ।
 चरामो वसुधां कृत्स्नां निगृह्णामो विमार्गगान् ।
 त्वद्विधान् भरतादेशान्निग्रहीतुं व्यवस्थिताः ॥

behind and then to say to his dying face what his fault is, is the most inhuman way of punishment, nowhere sanctioned in Law, much less could be approved by Bharata. Such punishment, inflicted unawares, gives the man concerned no chance to defend himself or to amend his conduct or to repent of his sin. He is thus deprived of all hope of seeking self-improvement on earth and deserving salvation in heaven hereafter. The *Tilaka* commentary remarks, 'as far as we know Bharata never gave such orders to Rāma at Chitrakūta; hence what Rāma says here is a black lie.*' Rāma further says :—

“To cohabit with a daughter, sister, or sister-in-law is a sin deserving death-penalty. By seizing the wife of Sugrīva you have offended against the Sanātana Dharma whose champion I am. I have therefore punished you according to law.”†

Such indeed may be the law of Āryāvarta, but what right Rāma had to apply it to those who were outside its jurisdiction. Laws and customs differ in every place. Even today in certain sections of Hindu society in the north western provinces

* The *Tilaka* on IV. 18. 25.

भरतेन साक्षाद्रामं प्रति आज्ञाया अकृतत्वात् मृषोक्तिरेवैषा ।

† *Vālmiki* : IV. 18.

औरसीं भगिनीं वापि भार्या वाप्यनुजस्य यः ।

प्रचरेत् नरः कामात्तस्य दण्डो वधः स्मृतः ।

भ्रातुर्वर्तसि भार्यायां त्यक्त्वा भर्म सनातनम् ।

रुमायां वर्तसे कामात्स्नुषायां पापकर्मकृत् ।

भ्रातृभार्याभिमर्शे ऽस्मिन्दण्डो ऽयं प्रतिपादितः ॥

two or three brothers have one common wife. Custom allows it and law recognises it. Will it do if a Maharashtrian butchers these brothers in cold blood and calls it an act of religion? Moreover, did Rāma represent the international court of justice? Besides, if it is a sin to enjoy the younger brother's wife who is as good as one's own daughter, it cannot be a virtue to ravish the elder brother's wife who is as venerable as one's own mother. But while Rāma kills Vāli mercilessly for the former transgression, he allows Sugrīva graciously to indulge in the latter transgression, though it is still worse.* His third argument is as follows :—

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 18.

ज्येष्ठो भ्राता पिता वापि यश्च विद्यां प्रयच्छति ।
त्रयस्ते पितरो ज्ञेया धर्मे च पथि वर्तिनः ॥

Here Rāma himself says to Vāli in the same breath :— ' One who precedes in birth, one who gives birth, one who imparts learning—these three are fathers to him who follows the path of righteousness. ' Naturally their wives are mothers to him.

Vālmiki : IV. 55.

स्थैर्यमात्ममनःशौचमानृशंस्यमथार्जवम् ।
विक्रमश्चैव धैर्यं च सुग्रीवे नोपपद्यते ।
भ्रातुर्ज्येष्ठस्य यो भार्या जीवतो महिषीं प्रियाम् ।
धर्मेण मातरं यस्तु स्वीकरोति जुगुप्सितः ॥

Here Atgada says :— ' In my uncle Sugrīva there is neither firmness of mind, nor purity of heart, nor humanity, nor straight dealing, nor true valour, nor even ordinary courage. During the life-time of his own elder brother Vāli, he committed incest with his wife who was morally his mother. Such a man deserves downright condemnation. ' "

(Continued on next page)

“Having made friendship with Sugrīva, I called him my own and promised him that I would not only recover his wife from the hands of Vāli, but also install him in the kingdom of Kishkindhā. Being a Kshatriya, how could I go back upon my word, or how else could I carry out my promise except in this manner* ?”

Here the cat is out of the bag. The utmost that Rāma could promise Sugrīva in the name of justice was to intercede on his behalf with Vāli for the sake of his wife. But to promise him the throne of Kishkindhā which by right of primogeniture belonged to his elder brother and from which he had been rightly kicked out as a traitor and usurper, then to fulfil that promise in so atrocious and unheroic a way, and finally to expect Vāli to admire him for his

(Continued from the previous page)

The *Tilaka* remarks :— सुग्रीवस्यापि ज्येष्ठभ्रातुर्बालिनः पितृसमस्य भार्याविमर्शनं तुल्यमिति दिक् ।

Thus it is evident from Vālmiki that Sugrīva had outraged the wife of his elder brother who, as Rāma himself admits, is a father to the younger brother. Later on Vālmiki will tell us how Sugrīva carried on his illicit connections with Tārā in her widowhood, though his own wife Rūmā had been recovered for him by Rāma :— तारया सहितः कामी सक्तः कपिवृषस्तदा ॥ Rāma knew this, but while he gave a long lecture to the dying Vāli, he said not a word to the sinning Sugrīva. Moreover, Tārā had a grown-up son, Aṅgada; hence Sugrīva's incest with her was as reprehensible as that of Claudius with Gertrude in *Hamlet*.

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 18. सुग्रीवेण च मे सख्यं लक्ष्मणेन यथा तथा ।
दारराज्यनिमित्तं च निःश्रेयसकरः स मे ।
प्रतिज्ञा च मया दत्ता तदा वानरसंनिधौ ॥
प्रतिज्ञा च कथं शक्या मद्विधेनानवेक्षितुम् ॥

faithful adherence to his word is the height of brazenfacedness. It is nothing short of robbing the rightful Peter to pay the lawless Paul and then looking around to see that the world applauds you as a redressor of wrongs and restorer of rights ! So did Hitler promise half of Poland to Stalin, and then smashed the other half down to implement his promise. So did Lord Auckland promise Shah Soojah, the exiled prince, the throne of Kabul against the better man, Dost Mahomed, and thereafter fought three bloody wars on Afgan soil to secure a bulwark for the Empire of India against the bogey of Russian menace. So did the Emperor of Japan promise full independence to Burma and Siam, and thereafter bled the two countries white in order to equip his troops for the further annexation of Asia to the land of the Rising Sun. And so did Rāma espouse the cause of the pretender against the rightful owner, and thereafter through the puppet on the throne of Kishkindhā commandeered the forces and resources of the country to plant the flag of the Solar Dynasty in the heart of Laṅkā ! Such is politics, and politics is not ethics. It is a ruthless struggle for power. Who-soever has brains in his head, and strength in his arms, and sternness in his heart, has also a feeling in his mind that he has a divine right to seize, by any means fair or foul, whatever he takes a fancy to. If he succeeds, everything foul will become fair; if he fails, everything fair will turn foul. As one poet observes :—

“Treason doth not succeeds, what is the reason ? If treason succeed, none dare call it treason,”

Since success and failure are the criterion of right and wrong in politics, it is ridiculous to apply the ethical standards of ordinary life to the ways of the extraordinary conquerors of the world. They prevailed by virtue of their superior strength and skilful adaptation of means to an end, pushing the weaker and less clever to the wall. Let us pay homage to them for what they ultimately achieved and study silently the grim situation which compelled them against their will to stoop down to methods which they themselves knew to be questionable. It is only when propagandists begin to spread sublime colours over their unscrupulous ways that they foolishly show them up as painted scoundrels. If they, for reasons of policy, cannot own up the truth, let them at least refrain from flimsy falsehood. Rāma argues further :—

‘By inflicting capital punishment upon you I have paved your way to salvation and saved my Bharata from perdition. For the scriptures say that when an offender is spared chastisement, he sends the king to hell, whereas if he receives condign punishment, he goes straight to heaven. I have thus done you a favour for which instead of thanking me, you have the ingratitude to remonstrate with me.*’

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 18.

सर्वथा धर्म इत्येव द्रष्टव्यस्तव निग्रहः ।
 श्रूयते मनुना गीतौ श्लोकौ चारित्र्यवत्सलौ ।
 राजभिः कृतदण्डाच्च स्वर्गमायान्ति पापिनः ।
 राजा त्वशासन् पापस्य तदवाप्नोति किञ्चिद्विषम् ॥

Dogmatism could go no further. By rubbing in the salt of scriptures, Rāma is really adding insult to injury. Moreover, Vāli was not a subject of Bharata at all; secondly, offences against sexual morality are not usually punished with death. Chandra, the god of moon, was not sent to the gallows for incest with Jupiter's wife; nor Indra, the king of heaven, for rape upon the wife of Gautama; nor Vishṇu, the Lord of the Universe, for violating the chastity of Vṛndā.* They were only made to suffer in such a way that by constant mortification they were purified of all taint. That is the right way to reclaim a man from the mire of licentiousness and save his soul from perdition. But Rāma killed Vāli unawares, while his mind was still sunk in lust ! He further says :—

“I am a Kshatriya given to hunting and you are a monkey living in the forest. If I have shot you stealthily while you were engaged with your rival, you cannot reproach me for it. Remember that it is the special privilege of hunters to kill their game unawares from a place of concealment.†”

* *Tulasi* : I.

परम सती असुराधिपनारी । तेहि बल ताहि न जितहिं पुरारी ॥
छल करि टारेउ तासु ब्रत प्रभु सुकरारज कीन्ह ।
जब तेहि जानेउ मरम तब साप कोप करि दीन्ह ॥

† *Vālmiki* : IV. 18.

यान्ति राजर्षयश्चात्र मृगयां धर्मकोविदाः ।
प्रतिच्छन्नाश्च विध्यन्ति न च दोषोऽत्र विद्यते ।
तस्मात्त्वं निहतो कुर्वन् युद्धमन्येन वानर ।
मया बाणेन निःशकं यस्माच्छाखामृगो ह्यसि ॥

Inconsistency has reached its climax here. If Vāli was no more than a monkey, it was absurd on the part of Rāma to discuss ethics with him. Hunters pursue animals for the sake of lively sport and not to punish them for promiscuous sexual relations. Nor in honour of the hunted creatures are funeral rites ever arranged according to Vedic formula, as was done by Rāma in the case of Vāli.* It is indeed strange that while Rāma makes away with Vāli lightly as a monkey, he coronates his brother Sugrīva splendidly as a man. Waters fetched from sacred rivers in golden jars and consecrated with Vedic mantras were sprinkled on the head of Sugrīva with the form and ceremony prescribed by ancient sages in Śrauta works.† Are monkeys ever installed in this fashion? When Rāma met Hanūmān for the first time, he was so impressed by his elegant speech that he could not help saying that Hanūmān must have studied the three Vedas and thoroughly mastered

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 25.

आरोप्य शिविकां चैव वालिनं हतजीवितम् ।
अलंकारैश्च विविधैर्माल्यैर्वस्त्रैश्च भूषितम् ।
चितामारोपयामास सोऽङ्गदः पितरं रुदन् ।
ततोऽग्निं विधिवद् दत्त्वा सोपसव्यं चकार ह ॥

† *Vālmiki* : IV. 26.

नदीनदेभ्यः संहृत्य तीर्थेभ्यश्च समन्ततः ।
अपः कनककुम्भेषु निधाय विमलं जलम् ।
प्राङ्मुखं विधिवन्मन्त्रैः स्थापयित्वा वरासने ।
अभ्यषिञ्चत सुग्रीवं हुत्वादौ जातवेदसम् ॥

the science of grammar.* Are monkeys ever capable of attaining such scholarship ? It is indeed unbecoming on the part of Rāma to play upon the word *Vānara* in defence of homicide and treat murder as mere sport by sheer verbal jugglery !

“We Kshatriyas are enlightened beings, the very gods born on earth to interpret to mankind by our acts the intricate principles of religion. Therefore what we say is law and what we do is right. You are but a benighted creature of the forest. You should not bandy words with me, but submit to your lot quietly in full faith that you have been sacrificed on the altar of justice.†”

Here ends the speech of Rāma. The peroration is in keeping with the rest of the argument. It reminds one of Shakespeare's lines :—

“I am Sir Oracle,
When I ope my lips, let no dog bark.”

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 3.

ततो दृष्ट्वा हनूमन्तं श्रीरामः प्राह लक्ष्मणम् ।
सूतं व्याकरणं कृत्स्नमनेन बहुधा श्रुतम् ।
बहु व्याहरतानेन न किञ्चिदपभाषितम् ॥
नानृग्वेदविनीतस्य नायजुर्वेदधारिणः ।
नासामवेदविदुषः शक्यमेवं विभाषितुम् ॥

† *Vālmiki* : IV. 18.

राजानो वानरश्रेष्ठ प्रदातारो न संशयः ।
दुर्लभस्य च धर्मस्य जीवितस्य शुभस्य च ।
देवा मानुषरूपेण चरन्त्येते महीतले ।
त्वं तु धर्ममविज्ञाय केवलं रोषमास्थितः ।
विदूषयसि मां धर्मे पितृपैतामहे स्थितम् ॥

Indeed, in trying to save the face of Rāma, his bards have fully laid him bare as a man swollen with insolence and conceit, arrogating to himself all wisdom and excellence, and admitting not a shred of intelligence and worth in his helplessly fallen foe. Well might his spirit in heaven lament,

“O God, save me from such friends !”

The plain fact is that while working with a singleness of aim towards the one goal of his life, namely, the liberation of Āryāvarta, Rāma was often confronted with a situation where political necessity ran counter to moral sentiment. When he failed to reconcile the two, he preferred the former in the interest of his ideal, though he suffered excruciating pangs at heart on account of the other. Witness his ruthless abandonment of Sītā in public interest and his subsequent mental tortures to the end of his life; though he wielded the golden sceptre with a placid face, yet he carried a rankling dart within himself. Similarly, when he had to leave his father on deathbed, with none of his four sons by his side to soothe the agonies of his parting soul, and also his mother, with the shadow of widowhood gradually creeping over her tear-stained face, how much his heart must have ached ! But once his mind was made up, he did not then vacillate like Hamlet, saying :—

‘Now to go or not to go, that is the question.’

He promptly suppressed his filial sentiments and fixing his eye only upon the much larger issue of his race, he turned his back upon whatever might happen to his parents and entered upon his career

as the saviour of his people. Similar was the state of his mind when he saw that unless Vāli was removed secretly in this manner, the attainment of his goal was altogether impossible. He heaved a sigh, but steeled his heart and dispatched Vāli outright, and thereafter managed the sequel wonderfully well, though his heart must have bled within. To say, as the above defence purports to show, that he felt morally exultant over this act, which he would fain have avoided but could not help doing, is to misjudge his character, to imply that he was dead to all finer feelings, and to deny him the grace of humanity which he actually had and which alone made his personality so lovable to all in spite of his occasional hardness of heart.

Bhāsa is the only poet who has boldly exposed the folly of justifying the murder of Vāli on moral grounds. In his *Abhiśeka-nāṭaka* he has inserted a dialogue between Rāma and Vāli on the combat-field, in which the former is completely floored by the latter. As the aforesaid contest of words is highly interesting, it deserves to be elaborately stated here. Mortally wounded in the chest and gasping for breath, Vāli looked tearfully at Rāma and said :—

“You call your self a hero and a saint, but as far as I am concerned, you have killed me like a coward and a knave. If you had any grudge against me, why did you not meet me face to face instead of stabbing me from behind ?”

Rāma replied rather haughtily :—

‘There is nothing objectionable in the manner in which I have killed you You are, I

say, only a beast living in the forest, whereas I am a Kahatriya given to the sport of hunting. It is customary for all hunters to beguile the game first into a trap and then shoot it from behind the branches of a tree or a thicket of creepers. I have acted similarly, and I do not think there is anything dishonourable in following the time-honoured custom.'

Vāli smiled sadly and said :—

"So you choose to call me a beast and kill me. One may give a dog a bad name gratuitously, then hang him callously, and call it fair and square. Such indeed are the ways of enlightened Kshatriyas who style themselves champions of justice ! Be it so. It is an eye-opener to me at the time of closing my eyes. However, let us now proceed on the assumption that I am only a beast of the forest, and see how far your act of killing me is justifiable. Now tell me, is it not a fact that hunters never kill any animal unless it is either eatable or harmful. Now it is as plain as daylight that in killing me your object was not to feast upon my flesh. I am not edible enough for your civilised stomach. Therefore I should like to know what harm I ever did you to deserve such death at your hands ?"

Now Rāma felt that the ground on which he had taken his stand was slipping from under his feet. Recovering his balance somehow, he said a little indifferently :—

"Well, as a matter of fact, you may not have done me any harm, but you have certainly wronged Sugriva by seizing his wife. Now

remember that incest with a younger brother's wife is a sin, altogether revolting to moral sense and entirely condemned by Aryan religion. Death is the only penalty prescribed for it and I have meted it out to you."

On hearing these words Vāli flared up and retorted:—

"Be consistent, Rāma ! You are blowing hot and cold in the same breath. You first call me a beast and then apply to me the moral and religious code which governs man's conduct in society. The two things are incompatible. If I am no more than a beast of the forest, then certainly my conduct was in accordance with the law that reigns supreme in the jungle, namely, that might is right. But since you judge my conduct by the ethical standards of human society, you must first admit that I am a man. And if I am a man, as I really am, then by your own confession you stand self-condemned before me as a coward and a murderer."

Now Rāma felt that the ground under his feet was completely cut away. But like a drowning man catching at a straw he said :—

"I again repeat that you are a beast. But you are also at the same time the king of beasts. Indeed, as the lord of Kishkindhā, you ought to have maintained a correct conduct. But since you swerved from the royal path, it was my duty as a Kshatriya to inflict capital punishment upon you."

Vāli made a gesture of disgust at Rāma and said contemptuously :—

"O fie upon the rationality of a Kshatriya who has the insolence to call his fellow-being a beast, and has the brutality to butcher him in cold blood, and when questioned, has only a subterfuge to offer in self-defence ! Instead of answering me straight, you have been constantly shifting your ground. Be it so. The sands of my life are running fast and I have only a few moments to live. But before I close my eyes, I shall still run you down in the new position you have taken and die in moral triumph over you. Now tell me if a certain conduct is condemnable in a king, does the same conduct, or why, even worse than that, become commendable in his brother ? "

Rāma could not guess what Vāli was driving at. He held his tongue and also his breath in apprehensive eagerness to hear more. Vāli proceeded calmly :—

"Some time ago, Rāma, I had to leave my kingdom to quit scores with an old enemy of mine. Before I went, I entrusted my subjects, my wife, and my son to the protection of my brother Sugrīva, whom I trusted as my own second self. But he betrayed my trust.* He

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 55.

कथं स धर्मं जानीते येन भ्रात्रा दुरात्मना ।
युद्धायाभिनियुक्तस्य गुहायाः पिहितं मुखम् ॥

Here Aṅgada says, "Does my uncle Sugrīva know even the meaning of virtue ? He is so wicked at heart that with fratricidal intentions he closed up the mouth of the cave, which my father had entered to pursue his enemy and which he had been asked to guard."

plotted against me and spread a rumour that I was dead. Then setting aside my son who was the legitimate heir, he usurped the throne and dragged my wife, Tārā, into his harem. He thus committed an act of treason against me who was not only his king but also his elder brother and therefore as venerable to him as a father. He also committed an act of outrage upon Tārā who was his elder sister-in-law and therefore as sacred to him as a mother. But though he stinks of treachery and incest, you kiss him as a paragon of virtue, and kick me as a monster of vice. Is that your idea of equity and justice ?”

What reply could Rāma make ? He quietly knelt down by the side of Vāli, stroked his quivering body gently with his hand, and dropped a tear on his face.* He assured him that though policy would compel him to place his brother on the throne, yet he would carefully safeguard the life and interests of his son. Simultaneously with the coronation of Sugrīva, he would install Angada in the office of Crown Prince, so that during the life-time of his uncle he would have equal share in the administration, and after his death succeed to the throne with-

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 24.

इत्येवमार्तस्य वचो निशम्य ।

संजातब्राह्मणः परवीरहन्ता ।

रामो मुहूर्तं विमना बभूव ॥

i. e. “On hearing the pathetic words of Vāli, the best of heroes, the eyes of Rāma, his slayer, were filled with tears and his mind was suffused with gloom.”

out any hitch. On hearing these words a look of calm came over the face of Vāli, his body ceased to writhe with pain and his soul happily flew to heaven.*

† But for Rāma's strict vigilance, Sugrīva would have secretly made away with Aṅgada, as is evident from the following apprehensions of Aṅgada himself:—

Vālmiki : IV. 55.

कथं शत्रुकुलीनं मां सुग्रीवो जीवयिष्यति ।

उपांशुदंडेन हि मां बन्धनेनोपपादयेत् ।

शठः क्रूरो नृशंसश्च सुग्रीवो राज्यकारणात् ॥

i. e. 'How can Sugrīva ever let me live even, as I am the son of Vāli, his rival? He is so unscrupulous, cruel, and inhuman that on some pretext or other he will cast me into a dungeon and finish me off there quietly for the sake of ensuring the permanency of the kingdom for himself and his offspring.'

This was exactly Vāli's anxiety also at the time of his death. Hence Rāma's assurance was as it were a nectar to his passing soul. Compare in this connection the relations of Claudius and Hamlet in Shakespear's *The Prince of Denmark*.

CHAPTER VII

The Climax is reached

Having compassed the death of Vāli by an act contrary to all the laws of fair fighting and having disposed of his body honourably according to the rules of Vedic funeral, Rāma sent Lakshmaṇa into the city to arrange for the installation of Sugrīva as king, and of Angada as Crown Prince, with form and ceremony, in pomp and splendour, appropriate to the occasion. It is highly significant that Rāma did not personally attend the ceremony of Coronation. Perhaps the tragic fate of Vāli and his dying words so much rankled in his heart that he had no wish to see with his own eyes the glorification of an ignoble wretch on the throne of a noble hero. Circumstances had compelled him to espouse the cause of Sugrīva and use him as a tool, but he could have no real liking or respect for him. He excused himself on the plea that as he was serving his term of exile in the forest, he could not enter any town or village for fourteen years.* He stayed away from the jubilations

* *Vālmīki* : IV. 26.

चतुर्दश समाः सौम्य ग्रामं वा यदि वा पुरम् ।
न प्रवेक्ष्यामि हनुमन् पितुर्निर्देशपारगः ॥

in Kishkindhā, and that gives us a glimpse of his inner character as distinct from his political doings.

When Sugrīva had realised his ambition, gained the kingdom and regained his wife, he dropped Rāma completely from his mind and abandoned himself solely to sensual indulgences. Treacherous and licentious before, he proved ungrateful and voluptuous afterwards.* His love for his own wife was only skin-deep; what he passionately longed for was the lovely skin of Tārā. With her he sported day and night, leaving the kingdom to the care of his ministers.† Rāma waited in vain to hear from him that he had started mobilising the resources of his country and putting his men in fighting trim for the sake of a gigantic struggle with Rāvaṇa. But no word came from him. The days passed without any activity. Precious time was being lost for nothing.

* *Vālmīki* : IV. 26.

स त्वं ग्रामेषु भोगेषु सक्तो मिथ्याप्रतिश्रवः ।
अनार्यस्त्वं कृतघ्नश्च मिथ्यावादी च वानर ।
पूर्वं कृतार्थो रामेण न तत्प्रतिकरोषि यत् ॥

Here Hanumān rebukes Sugrīva : " Since you do not repay the debt of gratitude you owe to Rāma and remain absorbed in carnal pleasures, you are evidently mean, ungrateful, false-hearted, and untruthful." Even Angada says the same thing.

Vālmīki : IV. 55.

सत्यात्पाणिगृहीतश्च कृतकर्मा महायशाः ।
विस्मृतो राघवो येन स कस्य सुकृतं स्मरेत् ॥

† *Ibid* : IV. 29. मन्त्रिषु न्यस्तकार्यं च कामवृत्तमिव स्थितम् ।
विहरन्तमहोरात्रं तारया सहितं कपिम् ।
सुग्रीवं समुपागम्य हनूमान् वाक्यमब्रवीत् ॥

The interminable delay on the part of Sugrīva convinced him that his lacherous ally meant to leave him in the lurch, thinking that he had now nothing more to gain from him. He grew uneasy and lost his patience.* He sent Lakshmana to warn him in categorical terms that if he did not fulfill his part of the contract at once, he would soon find himself in hell. Hanūmān, the most capable man in Kishkindhā and ever true to his oath of loyalty to Rāma, also gave Sugrīva a bit of his mind. He told him what the consequences would be, if he procrastinated any further.† The threat told, and Sugrīva was roused from his sloth to brisk activity.

When Sugrīva saw the fury of Lakshmana and heard his message, when he saw Hanūmān and other supporters of his altogether out of sympathy with him, he realised the insecurity of his position. He knew full well that Rāma still held the people so completely under his hypnotic power that if he so willed it, he could raise the devil against him in no time and bring about a revolution in Kishkindhā in favour of Angada. He felt that he was standing on the brink of a volcano which might burst any moment and engulf him. Fear took possession of him and drove out all lust from his mind. His conscience

* Ibid : IV. 28. सुग्रीवस्य कृतार्थस्य प्रसादमभिकांक्षयन् ।
शोकश्च मम विस्तीर्णः, अपारो भाति रावणः ॥

† Ibid : IV. 29. कृतं चेन्नातिजानीषे राघवस्य महात्मनः ।
सद्यस्त्वं निशितैर्बाणैर्हतो द्रक्ष्यसि वालिनम् ।
न स संकुचितः पन्था येन वाली हतो गतः ॥

was now fully awake. Trembling from head to foot he went down on his knees before Lakshmaṇa and cried for mercy. Thereafter he put himself entirely at the service of Rāma and worked vigorously to help forward his undertaking, rather through dread of punishment from him than from a sense of gratitude to him.* Preparations were set on foot in right earnest. Recruitment, training, and equipment of armies started all around. The storing of war material began. Arrangements for regular supplies were made. Reconnaissance parties were sent in various directions under competent leaders.

To Hanūmān were entrusted two vital tasks. If he succeeded, it would be plain sailing to victory; if he failed, victory would be despaired of. The first task was to discover a passage across the channel for conveying large bodies of troops easily, quickly, and safely to the shore of Laṅkā. Unless such a passage was discovered, further movement would come to a standstill. The second task was to win over Vibhishana and spread out through him a net-work of informers, saboteurs, and underground workers within the stronghold of Rāvaṇa. Unless the enemy was weakened from within, his defeat from

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 55.

लक्ष्मणस्य भयेनेह नाधर्मभयभीरुणा ।

आदिष्टा मार्गितुं सीता धर्मस्तस्य कथं भवेत् ॥

Here Angada says, "Sugriva has sent us out to search for Sita only through fear of the wrath of Lakshmaṇa and not through abhorrence of his own sin of ingratitude. How can there be any trace of virtue in him?"

without would be a sheer impossibility. In addition, Hanūmān had to report on the coastal fortifications of Laṅkā, their vulnerable points, the intricate lines of forts, ramparts, and moats that surrounded the city, the gates and their protection, the strength and condition of the army, the size and position of military buildings.* In all these tasks, though extremely difficult, Hanūmān succeeded marvellously well by dash and courage, tact and foresight, and by presence of mind and readiness of resource. In fact he smoothed the path of Rāma and placed victory almost within the hollow of his hand. Rāma had only to close his fingers upon it. Hence the name of Hanūmān is permanently associated with that of Rāma as the ideal servant of the ideal master. He symbolises the spirit of loyal, intelligent, and disinterested service, which carries out orders at all costs, always discovering ways to get over difficulties and never inventing excuses to fight shy of them. He is our god of strength, purity, and devotion. There is not a village in India but has a temple of Hanūmān in it. Vālmiki says :—

“He is the best of men who, when appointed by his lord to a work of peculiar difficulty, does it as willingly and whole-heartedly as though it were his own. On a singular mission was Hanūmān

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 3.

प्रतिजग्राह काकुत्स्थो हनूमन्तमथाब्रवीत् ।
 कति दुर्गाणि लंकाया दुर्गायास्तद् ब्रवीष्व मे ।
 बलस्य परिमाणं च द्वारदुर्गक्रियामपि ।
 गुप्तिकर्म च लंकाया रक्षसां सदनानि च ॥

sent and with a signal success he returned. Indeed, he never stooped to meanness in life and always served Rāma with loyalty. ”*

Now with regard to the first task of finding a passage, although the distance from India to Lankā is said to be eight hundred miles in Vālmīki,† yet the position as it actually stands to-day is as follows. About two miles from the Indian coast, is the Island of Rameshwaram, which is eleven miles long and was, in the opinion of geologists, joined to the mainland some centuries ago by a rocky causeway. About thirty miles from the Island of Rameshwaram is the other island of Manar, which is nearly eighteen miles in length and is just off the opposite coast of Ceylon. Between these two islands stretches a straggling chain of sandy rocks, submerged but not much below the surface of water, impassable to ships of burden and known in the present day as Adam's Bridge. Thus though the distance of Lankā from the mainland is sixty miles from shore to shore, yet the real problem before Hanūmān was how to negotiate the thirty miles of salt water between the two islets of Rameshwaram

* *Vālmīki* : VI. 1.

यो हि भृत्यो नियुक्तः सन् भर्त्रा कर्मणि युज्यते ।
 कुर्यात्तदनुरागेण तमाहुः पुरुषोत्तमम् ।
 तन्नियोगे नियुक्तेन कृतं कृत्यं हनूमता ।
 न चात्मा लघुतां नीतः श्रीरामश्चापि तोषितः ॥

† *Vālmīki* : IV. 58.

इतो द्वीपे समुद्रस्य संपूर्णे शतयोजने ।
 तस्मिँल्लंका पुरी रम्या निर्मिता विश्वकर्मणा ॥

and Manar. Strong and agile as he was by nature, he discovered by dint of perseverance and defiance of danger this submerged chain of rocks, and by jumping from rock to rock with a pole he landed safe and sound on the shore of Laṅkā. That he traversed the distance in a single leap through the air is only a poetic appreciation of none the less romantic feat of Hanūmān in an unexplored sea. His struggle with the guardian demon of the sea during flight and with the watchful deity of Laṅkā on landing obviously refers to his fight with the sentries and watchmen, whom Rāvaṇa must have posted on the island of Manar and on the shore to guard the hidden approach to his insular place. Hanūmān is said to have crushed both the demon and the deity with one stroke of his foot. It seems that the undisturbed peace which the Rākshasa sentries had enjoyed so far had lulled them into a false sense of security and made them careless. Naturally when Hanūmān came upon them all of a sudden, they were too unprepared to resist and hence could be easily overthrown. He caught them napping and sent them to eternal peace. So did Tānāji surprise the dosing sentries at Sinhagarh and, having dispatched them all without a noise, obtain a foothold on the wall of the fort.

Having arrived at the city of Laṅkā, Hanūmān remained hidden outside until dusk.* When the sun

* *Vālmiki* : V. 2. इहाहं यदि तिष्ठामि स्वेन रूपेण संवृतः ।
विनाशमुपयास्यामि भर्तुरर्थद्वयं हास्यति ।

went down, he assumed the disguise of an old hunch-back, bent double under the weight of years and therefore looking much smaller than his usual size. In this disguise he entered the city unnoticed and unsuspected. As he hobbled along the streets, watching and listening attentively, he gathered from the talk of the people that Sitā was kept in Aśokavana under a female guard. At about midnight he bent his steps towards that place, and there gliding softly from tree to tree under cover of darkness, he arrived at a spot where at the foot of a Śinsāpā tree sat a woman, listless and limp, with her head leaning back languidly against its trunk, wrapped up in her own thoughts. A few Rākshasa-women, who were supposed to keep watch on her, sprawled carelessly around, thinking that she was too frail to need any watching, too timid to play them any tricks. The night had far advanced and sleep had naturally stolen upon them all.* Hanūmān waited for a while and listened.

(Continued from the previous page)

सूर्ये चास्तंगते रात्रौ देहं संक्षिप्य मारुतिः ।
प्रविवेश पुरीं रम्यां प्रविभक्तमहापथाम् ॥

The *Tilaka* :— परैरवगम्यमानत्वाद्दिनाशमुपयास्यामि भर्तुरर्थहानिश्च
तस्मादासायं क्वचिद्विरिगुहायां निःशंकं स्थित्वा रजन्यां स्वेनैव रूपेण परंतु ह्रस्वतां
गतो लंकांमभिपतिष्यामीत्यर्थः ॥

* The *Adhyātma* : V. 2.

ददर्श शिशपावृक्षमत्यन्तनिबिडच्छदम् ।
तन्मूले च स्थितां दीनां शोक्ध्यानपरायणाम् ।
ददर्श हनुमान्सीतां, समन्ताद्राक्षसस्त्रियः ।
दूष्णीमासंस्तत्र तत्र निद्रावशमुपागताः ॥

No one stirred. All nature seemed hushed in silence. The moon rose softly above the horizon at this time and threw its mild splendour upon the face of the guarded woman. He peered at her closely. Could she be Sītā, the world-famous embodiment of feminine grace and charm ? The contrast between the report and the reality struck him speechless. He was plunged in doubt for some time.* But who else could she be ? The surroundings pointed to her being no other than Sītā. Obviously it was shame and sorrow gnawing at her heart that had altered her looks. Having thus set his doubts at rest and assuming that she was Sītā, he woke her up gently from her reverie. To convince her that he was a messenger from Rāma he showed her his ring. He then narrated to her briefly all the events that had happened since her disappearance from Pañchavaṭī. He assured her that preparations were almost complete to take full vengeance on Rāvaṇa and release her honourably from her dishonourable captivity. From her he learnt, among other things, that Trijatā was a jewel of a woman and that Saramā often told her, by way of consolation, how her husband sympathised with Rāma and detested Rāvaṇa. Who was Saramā ? The wife of Vibhīṣaṇa ! Indeed, this augured well for his negotiations with

* *Vālmīki* : V. 15 to 17.

प्रजगाम नभश्चन्द्रो निर्मलं निर्मलोदयः ।
 स ददर्श ततः सीतां क्लृष्टरूपां तपस्विनीम् ।
 तस्य संदिदिहे बुद्धिस्तथा सीतां निरीक्ष्य च ।
 तर्कयामास सीतेति कारणैरुपपादिभिः ॥

him. Bidding farewell to Sītā, he made his way to Vibhishana's house.

He found Vibhishana too willing to join in the conspiracy against his brother to need much persuasion from him. He was, as it were, waiting to receive overtures from the enemy. Directly the bait of royalty was dangled before his eyes, his mouth watered profusely and his heart overflowed with affection for Rāma. Rāma's cause appeared to him right and just; that of Rāvaṇa, unjust and wrong. Why should it not ? By the grace of Rāma he could, without losing a single drop of his blood, rise from the position of a nonentity to the dignity of a king, if only he betrayed his brother and helped secretly in the wholesale slaughter of his blood relations. It was a fine bargain, and who that has a speck of wisdom in his head would ever refuse it ? Moreover, by working against his own kith and kin there was no fear of his ever losing face in the world; on the contrary, his face would be brightened for ever by coming over to Rāma; for even filth became fragrant by contact with flowers. Then why should he be infamous by associating himself with Rāma ? The bards of Rāma would never show him up a traitor, but proclaim him a lover of truth, a supporter of right, and a pillar of virtue ! The bargain was therefore struck in the very first meeting. It was decided that Vibhishana should continue to stay in Laṅkā as long as he did not fall under the suspicion of Rāvaṇa. Till then he was to collect and supply up-to-date information of military value to Rāma. He must also through his agents spread discontent among the

people, telling them that Rāvaṇa was unnecessarily exposing them to the horrors of war for the sake of a mere wench. He must carefully hide from their minds the real racial issue involved in the forthcoming struggle, the issue for which Rāvaṇa had worked and toiled, fought and triumphed over the Aryans throughout his life,—the Aryans who had aggressively descended into the land of his forefathers, dispossessed them of their rich soil in the north, pushed them into the wilderness of the south and called them demons into the bargain, themselves posing as descendants of the gods ! Vibhishana was warned never to touch upon this vital question of racial survival in his propaganda. And so he agreed in his own selfish interest. Both shook hands with each other, fully satisfied in their own way, and parted.

Having thus mataphorically set fire to the enemy's stronghold, Hanūmān returned as quietly as he had gone, but with one big difference. When he went, his heart had sunk in despair at the sight of the terrible fortifications of Laṅkā, bewildering in construction and bristling with engines of destruction. He says :—

‘Of what avail will the valour of our warriors be here ? This Laṅkā can never be carried by assault. Even if Rāma lands here, what possibly can he do, though mighty-armed he may be ? To try to breach these defensive lines is to dash one's head against a rocky wall. The Rākshasas here are so fierce and determined that words of conciliation can never soften them; so loyal and united, that seeds of dissension can never take

root among them; and so tenacious and brave that they will rather sell their lives dear than yield an inch of ground cheap. If my first impressions prove correct in the end, there is not the ghost of a chance for us.’*

Thus had Hanūmān felt depressed on arriving in Laṅkā. But when he came away from there, his heart was buoyed up with a hope of victory, which almost amounted to a certainty. He says :—

“By me has this Laṅkā been wounded in its vital part, from where it will now bleed to death. I have already consigned it to blazes, and before long it will be a heap of ashes. The fortifications may look impregnable from without, but the canker-worm I have planted inside will eat them hollow from within. Let the weapons of Indrajit dazzle the eye, but they will be as harmless as a firefly. I now feel confident that I can alone wipe out this island with all its inhabitants and finish Rāvaṇa with all his relations. If I had the permission, I would have laid him low myself. But Rāvaṇa is a noble soul after all and deserves to be dealt with like a hero on the open field. As a faithful servant of Rāma, my duty ends with sowing the seeds of victory. Let my lord

* *Vālmiki* : V. 2.

न हि युद्धेन वै लंका शक्या जेतुं सुरैरपि ।
 आगत्यापीह हरयो भविष्यन्ति निरर्थकाः ।
 प्राप्यापि सुमहाबाहुः किं करिष्यति राघवः ।
 अवकाशो न साम्मस्तु राक्षसेष्वभिगम्यते ।
 न दानस्य न भेदस्य नैव युद्धस्य दृश्यते ॥

now come here personally and reap a rich harvest of glory.”*

This is, in my opinion, the true meaning of Hanūmān's visit to Laṅkā. The fantastic description, full of cloying detail, given by several poets and dramatists as to how he laid the garden waste, where Sita was by Rāvaṇa kept; how he slaughtered singlehanded the Rākshasa warriors by hundreds; how he slipped them one and all, but in the end let himself be caught to make further ghastly havoc; how he drew his tail to abnormal length, until it reached the cloudland; how they stripped the city naked to wrap it up from end to end; how they failed to set it aflame, when Rāvaṇa blew it into flames and had his whiskers all aflame; how with his fiery tail he jumped from place to place and setting the houses all ablaze, burn'd the city to dust and ashes,—all such description, which is obviously meant for the amusement of the illiterate, the childish, and the credulous, must be rejected as

* *Vālmiki* : V. 60.

मयैव निहता लंका, दग्धा भस्मीकृता पुरी ।
तां लंकां तरसा हन्तुं रावणं च सन्नान्धवम् ।
अहमेकोऽपि पर्याप्तः सराक्षसगणां पुरीम् ।
यदि शक्रजितास्त्राणि दुर्निरीक्षाणि संयुगे ।
तान्यहं निहनिष्यामि विधमिष्यामि राक्षसान् ।
यन्न हन्मि दशग्रीवं, स महात्मा दशाननः ।
सर्वथाऽतिप्रकृष्टोऽसौ रावणो राक्षसेश्वरः ।
अहं कोसलराजस्य दासः पवनसंभवः ।
निमित्तमात्रं रामस्तु वधे तस्य भविष्यति ॥

altogether absurd and misleading. The Marathi poets are most guilty in this respect. They had to popularise the Rāmāyaṇa among the hill tribes of the Western Ghats, and therefore to catch the imagination of these backward people they painted each scene in glaring colours and with superhyperbolic touches. Thus the poet Rāmadāsa describes the adventures of Hanūmān in this way :—

‘When they applied fire to his tail, it smouldered and smoked, but would not burn with flame. Warriors came in successive waves to blow it into a blaze, but they all blowed themselves out of wind. Then came Rāvaṇa fulminating with rage, and as he emitted a strong current of breath, the smoking fire burst into flames, spluttering and crackling aloud. His moustaches and whiskers, which for years had grown to coarse luxuriance, burnt merrily and disappeared in specks of ashes. As the tail blazed forth emitting terrific noise, Hanūmān flew up to a tremendous height and burnt the Trikūṭa mountain on which the city of Lankā stood. Thrusting his tail into houses through gates, he set everything burning—towers and turrets, markets and stalls, buildings and palaces. The citizens ran about stark naked, helter-skelter, screaming and shouting.’*

* The *Samartha Rāmāyaṇa* : Sundarakāṇḍa (In Marāṭhi).

तया लावितां वह्निं तेथें न लागे ।

बळें फुकितां तो विरेंवीर भागे ।

(Continued on next page)

What these poets forget is that Hanūmān had been sent on an extremely delicate mission, and it would have been altogether impolitic on his part to indulge in monkey tricks and, by revealing himself thus glaringly, to put Rāvaṇa wise to the storm that was secretly brewing over his head. In *Vālmiki* he himself says :—

“The Rākshasas here are so spirited and brave, so watchful and alert that to elude their vigilance and do our job is not easy. I must therefore move with great caution and commit no act of indiscretion. I must bear in mind that I am alone, with none to help me; hence I can

(Continued from the previous page)

तया देखतां रावणू सीघ्र आला ।
 बळें फुंकितां फुंकितां तो गळाला ।
 पुढें रावणू थोर कोपें कडाडी ।
 बळें फुंकितां ज्याळ नेटें भडाडी ।
 जळालीं मुखें भस्मल्या खाडमीषा ।
 बहूसाल लंबीत होत्या विशेषा ।
 बळें चेतला वल्लि नेटें भडाडी ।
 कडाडीत ज्याळा दडाडी धडाडी ।
 कपीवीर तो वाड झाला उडाला ।
 पुढे जाळिता जाहला त्रीकुटाला ।
 गृहांगोपुरांमाजि तो पुच्छ घाली ।
 त्रिकूटाचळीं आगि नेटें निषाली ।
 बिदी, हाट, बाजार, चौवार कुंचे ।
 पळे बोंबली नागिवा लोक नाचे ॥

These lines display a riot of fun, fancy, and mere sound, which can please only those who have not yet outgrown their child-hood or have just slid back into it.

be easily overpowered, arrested, and shot dead as a spy. Indeed, if my presence is detected here, the entire plan of my master will miscarry and I shall thus be guilty of an unpardonable breach of faith. Those ambassadors and agents who do not keep strictly to the orders they have received, and in their love of the spectacular, act in utter disregard of time and place are not the supporters but betrayers of their master's cause."*

How inconsistent with these sensible words are the senseless descriptions of later Sanskrit and Prakrit poets ! If Hanūmān really possessed such miraculous prowess that he could run amok with impunity in the very stronghold of Rāvaṇa and whip his troops to death with a single stroke of his tail, why did Rāma, after securing his inestimable services, plan the destruction of Vālī to gain his army and treasury, or threaten Sugrīva with dire results if he delayed in supplying him the necessary

* *Vālmīki* : V. 2.

महौजसो महावीर्या बलवन्तश्च राक्षसाः ।
 वंचनीया मया सर्वे स्वामिकार्यं प्रकुर्वता ।
 मयि दृष्टे तु रक्षोभी रामस्य विदितात्मनः ।
 भवेद् व्यर्थमिदं कार्यं रावणानर्थमिच्छतः ।
 इहाहं यदि तिष्ठामि स्वेन रूपेण संवृतः ।
 विनाशमुपयास्यामि भर्तुरर्थश्च हास्यति ।
 भूतार्थाश्च विनश्यन्ति देशकालविरोधिताः ।
 विक्लवं दूतमासाद्य तमः सूर्योदये यथा ।
 घातयन्तीह कार्याणि दूताः पण्डितमानिनः ॥

sinews of war, or even when fully equipped with men and material, still say anxiously* :—

“Rāvaṇa is a formidable enemy, still so far beyond me that I do not know how I shall be able to get the better of him ?”

Or even after the triumphant return of Hanūmān from Laṅkā, still pass nights and days restlessly over the problem as to how he should transport his troops across the channel, and say† :—

“Hanūmān has done well in tracing the whereabouts of Sītā; but at the sight of this ocean, so vast and profound, my heart sinks within me. The monkey warriors are all assembled to fight for me, but how will they reach the battleground which is on the other side ?”

Rāma certainly would never have lost his peace of mind, if Hanūmān could really swell to the size of a mountain and stretch his tail to interminable length. For he could as well then form an excellent bridge with his tail for the troops to cross over to Laṅkā. Or why, there was even no necessity of taking this trouble; for, by simply extending his tail, Hanūmān could drag the whole Island down to the feet of Rāma, just as Gulliver had pulled the entire fleet of ships at Lilliput with only one of his arms !

* *Vālmiki* : IV. 29.

स तदा वालिनं हत्वा रामो लक्ष्मणमब्रवीत् ।
रावणश्च महान् शत्रुरपारः प्रतिभाति मे ॥

† *Ibid* : VI. 1. सर्वथा सुकृतं तावत् सीतायाः परिमार्गणम् ।
सागरं तु समालोच्य पुनर्नष्टं मनो मम ।
कथं नाम समुद्रस्य दुष्पारस्य महाभसः ।
हरयो दक्षिणं पारं गमिष्यन्ति समागताः ॥

Alas ! How these puerile bards have degraded the glorious history of Rāma to the level of a cock-and-bull story. Alas ! How they have smothered the genuine poetry of Vālmiki with their additions of tawdry art and taken such a stranglehold on the minds of our people that in times of crisis this land of Rāma has always looked to miracles from heaven, and sunk lower and lower in slavish mentality. The foreigners have taken full advantage of this monkey-tail-ridden faith of ours and put the yoke squarely upon our neck. We have borne the yoke loyally and in childish belief that some day Hanūmān would extend the backward appendage of his body to lift us up from the mire of drudgery and place us on top of the world. Thus though the Rāmāyaṇa is fervently read by us, the fruit thereof has gone to our conquerors from the North and the West.

When Hanūmān made his report to Rāma, he felt exceedingly happy. With tears in his eyes he embraced Hanūmān and said :—

“I have no words to express my gratitude to you, nor any reward to offer you in return for your services. I simply call you my all-in-all. Henceforth you will have permanent place by my side.”*

1 The *Adhyātma* : V. 5.

हनूमंस्ते कृतं कार्यं देवैरपि सुदुष्करम् ।
 उपकारं न पश्यामि तव प्रत्युपकारिणः ।
 इदानीं ते प्रयच्छामि सर्वस्वं मम मास्ते ।
 इत्याल्लिख्य हनूमन्तं सार्द्धेनेत्रो रघूत्तमः ॥

Hence it is that no temple or picture of Rāma is said to be complete without the figure of Hanūmān close by. However, thereafter began the movement of the troops from Kishkindhā towards the southern coast. The march of the army is graphically described in the *Adhyātma* as follows :—

“Sugrīva was the Commander-in-chief of all forces; the other Chiefs took their stations at the head of their respective divisions. The troops, well armed and appointed, formed a square with Rāma and Lakshmaṇa in the centre. Their numbers were large and their spirits high. Day and night they marched on in the most regular order, swift as the wind, passing lightly over mountains, wilds, and sands in utter scorn of the difficulties of the route, subsisting on the fruits and roots of the forest, maintaining inter-communication among themselves with sounds of shells, encouraging each other to hasten on to exterminate Rāvaṇa, the pest of the world, until they reached the southern shore, where they looked with astonishment at the waves of the sea, rolling one after another with a tremendous noise.”

When the shore was reached, the first concern of Rāma was to see that the troops were comfortably encamped in huts made of leaves. Then as he lay cogitating about his further moves, there came a report that Vibhīṣaṇa had arrived with four of his principal conspirators. It was a happy news, which promised a solution of his immediate difficulties.

After the departure of Hanūmān, Vibhīṣaṇa could not stay long in Laṅkā, but had to fly for his

dear life. Rāvaṇa somehow came to know of his secret dealings with the enemy and subversive activities in the kingdom. One day he called him into his presence and gave it him hot :—

“You are a disgrace to the Rākshasa race. I cry shame upon you. If you were not my brother, your head would not have remained on your shoulders by now. You are a dirty dog and I don’t wish to see your wretched face again. Get out of my sight, if you love your life. I would rather dwell with my deadly enemy or even with a furious poisonous serpent, but never with a person like you who wish well to the enemy and speak ill of me, who harbour blackest intentions towards me under a show of friendly instructions and carry a rotten soul within under a saintly face. You say that it is dishonourable to carry off another’s wife, but is it honourable to mutilate another’s sister ? I have at any rate given the honours of a lady to the wife of Rāma, but he treated my sister worse than a dog. The dog loses only his tail, but she has lost her face for ever. If you had any sense of honour, you would never plead for him, but cry for revenge like me. Shameless as you are, you advise me to kiss the feet of Rāma who has kicked us all on the head. Well, if it pleases you, do it yourself.”*

(Continued on next page)

* *Vālmīki* : III. 37, VI. 16.

वसेत्सह सपत्नेन क्रुद्धेनाशीविषेण च ।

न तु मित्रप्रवादेन संवसेच्छत्रुसेविना ।

Vibhishana did not beg of Rāma his *bhakti*, as is popularly believed, but kingdom, life, and happiness for himself at the cost of his own brother, in destroying whom, root and branch, he promised his fullest help to Rāma to the best of his ability. Rāma knew him to be as despicable as Sugrīva and would not promise him anything in return, until he had disclosed to him first all the secrets of Rāvana, his weaknesses and strength. It is only after Vibhishana had laid the required information at his feet that he ordered a pot of water to be brought from the sea, and having emptied it on his head, declared him solemnly the future Lord of Laṅkā.* After this

(Continued from previous page)

कर्णनासापहारेण भगिनी मे विरूपिता ।
 अवश्यं तु मया सीता हर्तव्या कोपशान्तये ।
 वाक्यमप्रतिकूलं तु मृदुपूर्वं त्वयोच्यते ।
 नाभिनन्देत् तद्राजा मानार्थी मानवर्जितम् ।
 योऽन्यस्त्वेवंविधं ब्रूयाद्वाक्यमेतन्निशाचर ।
 अस्मिन्मुहूर्ते न वसेत् त्वां तु धिक् कुलपांसन ।
 इत्युक्तः परुषं वाक्यमाजगाम विभीषणः ।
 चत्वारोऽप्यनुचरास्तस्य यत्र रामः सलक्ष्मणः ॥

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 19.

भवद्गतं हि मे राज्यं जीवितं च सुखानि च ।
 राक्षसानां वधे साह्यं करिष्यामि यथाबलम् ।
 तस्य तद्वचनं श्रुत्वा रामो वचनमब्रवीत् ।
 आख्याहि मम तत्त्वेन रावणस्य बलाबलम् ।
 तथोक्तवन्तं रामस्तु परिष्वज्य विभीषणम् ।
 अब्रवीत्लक्ष्मणं प्रीतः समुद्राज्जलमानय ।
 तेन चेमं मह्नाप्राज्ञमभिषिञ्च विभीषणम् ॥

Rāma called together a Council of War to consider how they should cross the ocean. Some suggested swimming, others jumping. Vibhīṣhaṇa laughed down their suggestions and said that Laṅkā could never be taken by going there in driblets, but must be assaulted in force all at once. He, therefore, insisted that a bridge should be built on the foundation of the rocks that lay hidden from shore to shore. His proposal was fully approved by Rāma and unanimously accepted by all.* Thereupon Nala, the engineer, offered to undertake this task, if the required material was supplied him in sufficient quantity. Forthwith labour gangs were dispatched in all directions; and they brought trunks of trees, slabs of stone, ropes of grass, and tendrils of creepers, and gave them all to Nala. The bridge was put through in five days,† a remarkable achievement like that of the Japanese in the last Great War, when they constructed a causeway from Malaya to Singapore in a couple of days and took the British general completely by surprise and altogether unprepared to meet the sudden attack. When the bridge was completed, Rāma ordered Vibhīṣhaṇa to go

* Ibid : VI. 19.

अवद्ध्वा सागरे सेतुं लंका नासादितुं क्षमा ।
विभीषणस्य मन्त्रोऽयं मम लक्ष्मण रोचते ॥

† *Valmiki* : V. 22.

पर्वतांश्च समुत्पाद्य यत्रैः परिवहन्ति च ।
बभञ्जुः पादपांस्तत्र प्रचकर्षुश्च सागरम् ।
सूत्राण्यन्ये प्रगृह्णन्ति तुणैः काष्ठैर्वन्धिरे ।
पञ्चमेन तथा चाह्ना सेतुं चक्रे नलस्ततः ॥

ahead and establish a bridgehead on the other side. This step taken by Rāma shows his foresight. Treachery was till then unknown among the Rākshasas, and therefore it could not be said with certainty whether Vibhīṣaṇa was really a traitor or only luring Rāma to his destruction. If it transpired that he was playing a double game, he could at once be shot dead; if he was correct in his information about the safety of a particular landing place, he could be further trusted. Moreover his presence on the enemy's shore with his Rākshasa followers would not excite suspicion for some time, at least until the whole army had safely crossed over and dug itself in.*

Before the army had crossed the sea, Rāvaṇa was informed by Śārdūla, an officer of the Intelligence Department, about its arrival on the southern coast in large numbers, its preparations and its future intentions. Rāvaṇa sought to break up its strength by means of dissension. He asked his trusted spy, Śuka, to enter the enemy's camp in the disguise of a vānara and deliver the following message to Sugrīva :—

“I wonder at your alliance with Rāma. How does it affect you at all, if I brought away his wife? Why should you waste your precious

* *Ibid* : V. 22. ततः पारे समुद्रस्य गदापाणिर्विभीषणः ।
 परेषामभियानार्थमतिष्ठत्सचिवैः सह ।
 ततस्तु रामः सैन्यस्य अग्रतः सहलक्ष्मणः ।
 अन्ये मध्येन गच्छन्ति पार्श्वतोऽन्ये प्लवंगमाः ॥

blood on his account ? You have now nothing to gain from him, but everything to lose by fighting for him. You will please remember my pact of friendship with your brother. I wish to continue the same relations with you and I hope you will reciprocate my sentiment. ”*

But the camp was so well-guarded under the directions of Hanūmān that before Śuka could get in touch with Sugrīva, he was caught and produced before Rāma. Rāma ordered that he should be kept under arrest until the army had safely landed on the other shore. Thereafter he was set free and asked to tell Rāvaṇa that he was now held in a vice and could not escape.

There is an adage in Sanskrit that whom the gods wish to destroy, him they deprive of clear thinking. Rāvaṇa held the enemy so cheap and counted so much on the diplomatic ability of Śuka that having sent him away to talk over Sugrīva, he gave no more thought to the matter and went to sleep. Sāraṇa, another spy of his, tried to wake him up, but he did not choose to stir either during the construction of the bridge, or when the army was crossing over. It is difficult to account for his inactivity. He was a great warrior, famous for his

1 *Vālmiki* : VI. 20.

शार्दूलस्य वचः श्रुत्वा शुक्ं प्रोवाच रावणः ।

सुग्रीवं ब्रूहि गत्वाशु राजानं वचनान्मम ।

अहं यद्यहरं भार्या राजपुत्रस्य धीमतः ।

किं तत्र तव सुग्रीव, किष्किन्धां प्रति गम्यताम् ।

न कश्चनार्थस्तव नास्त्यनर्थः तथापि मे भ्रातृसमो हरीश ॥

lightning tactics, but on this occasion he showed peculiar indifference and sluggishness. Was he too chivalrous to attack the enemy at a disadvantage and smash him on the narrow passage at sea ? Or was it a part of his strategy to have him on his own ground, then cut off his retreat and annihilate him to the last man ? Whichever way the truth may lie, he was mistaken either way. He had only one chance, the first and last, of averting his doom, and he let it slip like the Scottish King, James IV, at Flodden, 'where shiver'd was Scotland's spear and broken was her shield.' The feelings of the Scottish bard at this overwhelming disaster break out as follows :—

From Flodden ridge

The Scots beheld the English host
And heedful watch'd them as they cross'd
The Till by Twisel Bridge.

.....

.....

.....

And why stands Scotland idly now,
Dark Flodden, on thy airy brow,
Since England gains the pass the while,
And struggles through the deep defile ?
What checks the fiery soul of James ?
Why sits that champion of the dames
Inactive on his steed,
And sees, between him and his land,
Between him and Tweed's southern strand,
His host Lord Surrey lead ?
What 'vails the vain knight-errant's brand ?
O Douglas, for thy leading wand !
Fierce Randolph, for thy speed !
O for one hour of Wallace Wight,

Or well-skill'd Bruce, to rule the fight,
 And cry—'Saint Andrew and our right !'
 Another sight had seen that morn,
 From Fate's dark book a leaf been torn,
 And Flodden had been Bannockbourne !
 The precious hour has pass'd in vain,
 And England's host has gain'd the plain;
 Wheeling their march, and circling still,
 Around the base of Flodden hill.

How similar would have been the pathetic cry of a Rākshasa bard, if he had survived the massacre at Laṅkā !

The movements of Rāma were so quick that by the time Rāvaṇa awoke to the full gravity of the situation, he was hemmed in on all sides and cut off not only from the rest of the world but also from the rest of the island, as Napoleon III was at Metz in the Franco-German War of 1870. The blockade of Laṅkā was complete. Vibhīṣhaṇa proved an acquisition of inestimable value. He had first-hand knowledge of the topography of the place, of the fortifications and weapons of Rāvaṇa, of his generals and their specialities in offence and defence, of the numbers and disposition of his troops, of the location of his granaries and armouries and manufactories, of the secret passages leading to and out of the city. This knowledge he laid at the feet of Rāma. Vālmīki tells us that Rāma posted his generals and marshalled his troops according to the directions of Vibhīṣhaṇa, so that each of his generals might be more than a match to the opposing general on the other side,

‘My secret agents, he said, have just returned from the city with valuable information, which you will carefully listen to before making your dispositions.’*

The details need not be given here. The point that stands out clearly before us is that Rāvaṇa was crushed not so much by the prowess of Rāma as by the treachery of his own brother.

According to the Tilaka commentary on *Vālmīki*, the siege of Laṅkā lasted for eighty-eight days, starting on the second day of the bright fortnight of Māgha and ending on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra.† During this period the tide of battle swung to and fro, causing elation and dejection in turn among the combatants. Both the sides are said to have suffered heavily; rivers are said to have flowed from their blood, and hills to

* *Vālmīki* : VI. 31.

गत्वा लंकां ममामात्याः पुरीं पुनरिहागताः ।
 संविधानं यथाहुस्ते रावणस्य दुरात्मनः ।
 राम तद् ब्रुवतः सर्वं याथातथ्येन मे शृणु ।
 तदा व्यूह्य तवानीकं निर्मथिष्यसि रावणम् ॥

† The *Āgñiveśya* :—

माघशुक्लद्वितीयायाश्चैत्रकृष्णचतुर्दशीम् ।
 अष्टाशीतिदिनं युद्धं मध्ये पञ्चदशाहकम् ।
 युद्धावहारं संग्रामस्त्रिसप्ततिदिनान्यभूत् ।
 संस्कारो रावणादीनाममावास्यादिने ऽभवत् ॥

i. e. The war at Laṅkā lasted for eighty-eight days. But there were fifteen days of truce, on which both the sides abstained from hostilities by mutual agreement. Thus the actual days of fighting came to seventy-three.

have been formed of their corpses. But whereas the ranks of the Rākshasas thinned out considerably, those of the Vānaras continued at their original strength. The poetic explanation, as given in Vālmiki and others, is that Hanūmān frequently brought miraculous herbs from the northern mountain Gandhamādana, whereby the dead on his side were soon restored to life and were ready again to resume the fight. But the Rākshasas, once slain upon the field, never rose to their feet again and had to be thrown into the sea.* The rational explanation seems to be that since Rāma had taken care to see that his communications with the mainland were held intact, he received regularly from the north reinforcements in men and material; thus his losses were quickly made good, whereas those on the side of Rāvaṇa could never be replaced, as he was in a beleaguered fortress.

The insidious propaganda conducted by the agents of Vibhīṣhaṇa inside the city and the irreparable losses inflicted by the soldiers of Rāma from outside told in the long run. Serious discontent broke out among the citizens. Cries and curses filled the air. Rāvaṇa who had been the idol of his people now fell in their estimation to the level of an

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 74.

गत्वा हनूमन्ध्वानमुपर्युपरि सागरम् ।
 मृतसंजीवनं गृह्य हरीन्द्राणैश्च योजय ।
 ओषधीभिश्च कपयो मृतास्ते पुनरुत्थिताः ।
 ये हन्यन्ते रणे तत्र राक्षसाः कपिकुञ्जैः ।
 हता हतास्तु क्षिप्यन्ते सर्व एव तु सागरे ॥

idiot. There was not a woman in Laṅkā but had lost her husband or her son or her brother. They all wailed :—

“Damnation to Śūrpaṅakhā who incited Rāvaṇa to bring Sītā for our destruction ! For her sake he incurred the deadly hostility of Rāma. If he had only listened to the salutary advice of Vibhīṣhaṇa, this city of gold, where birds of paradise warbled day and night, would not have been the city of corpses, with vultures swarming over the putrid flesh.”*

In spite of these lamentations continuously splitting his ears, in spite of his losses mounting higher each day, in spite of the growing shortage of everything and increasing difficulties on all sides, Rāvaṇa conducted the defence admirably and retained his hold on the army so well that in spite of its diminishing strength it fought on with undiminished vigour. The exploits of Indrajit gave Rāma moments of blackest despair. He says :—

“How are we to overcome this young hero who rules the fight everywhere and is yet nowhere to be seen. He dazzles us with his missiles and baffles our efforts to locate him. Our army

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 94.

विधवा हतपुत्राश्च ह्याक्रोशन् हतवान्बवाः ।
 इयं शूर्पणखा हीना तन्निमित्तमिदं कृतम् ।
 राक्षसानां विनाशाय सीतानीता च रक्षसा ।
 विभीषणवचः कुर्याद् यदि स्म घनदानुजः ।
 स्मशानभूता दुःखार्ता नेयं लंका भविष्यति ॥

has lost so many of its bravest officers that it now looks desolate. We two have been disabled and put out of action. What hope is there now for us ? ”*

From this despondent mood he had to be roused and stirred to action by his friends :—

“Don’t forget yourself, Rāma ! Where has gone your buoyant spirit ? This is not the time to feel sore over our wounds, but to quit scores with our enemy. Indrajit may have worked havoc, but we can still rise superior to him, if we keep our wits about us. If you despair, our army will soon dissolve into a rabble rout. Be on your mettle, Rāma, and look the present situation squarely in the face.”†

Indeed, Indrajit proved true to his name. But what could mere valour do against heavy odds ? He knew that he was fighting with his back to the wall and that the end was within sight. In the last resort

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 73.

कथं नु शक्यो युधि नष्टदेहो निहन्तुमद्येन्द्रजिदुद्यतास्त्रः ।
एतच्च सर्वं पतिताग्न्यशूरं न भ्राजते वानरराजसैन्यम् ।
आवां तु सद्यः पतितौ निसंज्ञौ निवृत्तयुद्धौ हतहर्षरोषौ ॥

† *Vālmiki* : VI. 84.

उत्तिष्ठ नरशार्दूल दीर्घबाहो धृढव्रत ।
किमात्मानं महात्मानमात्मानं नावबुध्यसे ।
सीदते हि बलं सर्वं दृष्ट्वा त्वां शोककर्षितम् ।
इह त्वं स्वस्थद्वन्द्वस्तिष्ठ सत्त्वसमुच्छ्रितः ।
कर्मणा व्यपनेष्यामो दुःखमिन्द्रजिता कृतम् ॥

he turned to one mysterious weapon of his, which he had designed but not yet materialised. He had so far shrunk from using it, as he could not gauge its effect. Perhaps it might plunge all, friends and foes alike, into one common ruin. But he now decided to give it a tangible shape and use it, whatever the outcome might be. Let the world turn over a new leaf and start afresh, if it came to that. As the weapon was being forged to perfection in a hidden factory under his direct supervision, as Hitler's was in Germany, the spies of Vibhīṣaṇa hurried to convey him the news of it. He warned Rāma that if Indrajit's weapon saw the light of day, it would darken his future for ever. Even a moment's delay was fatal. Let Indrajit and his weapon be both buried together, while they were still underground. Thereafter Rāvaṇa would be as good as dead.* Lakshmaṇa therefore went at once with select troops by the secret passage shown by Vibhīṣaṇa and took Indrajit unawares. Though caught in a corner, he did not cry quarter, but fought to the death like a true hero.

Rāma was at this time supplied with an armoured car from the north by the king of kings and with a new miracle of destruction by Agastya from

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 84.

चैत्थं निकुम्भिलामद्य प्राप्य होमं करिष्यति ।
 दुराधर्षो भवत्येव संग्रामे रावणात्मजः ।
 लक्ष्मणं प्रेषयास्माभिः, रावणिं निशितैः शरैः ।
 स्याजयिष्यति तत्कर्म ततो वध्यो भविष्यति ।
 हते तस्मिन्हतं विद्धि रावणं ससुहृद्व्रणम् ॥

Dandakāranya.* Thus equipped, he felt doubly confident. Rāvaṇa, on the other hand, saw nothing but darkness around him. With the death of his son, the bravest of the brave, and with the destruction of his arsenal, the chief source of his strength, his last hope vanished. Now to wish for victory was mere self-deception, but to ask for quarter was a humiliation worse than death. Therefore he was determined to fight to the last ounce of his blood. He took the field in person and, with a few remnants of his forces, performed such feats of valour that Rāma-Rāvaṇa-battle came to be called by the poets a unique fight, unprecedented before and unsurpassed afterwards. Even Rāma admired him thus :—

“How brilliant is his martial spirit ! He dazzles the eye with his splendours, as though he were the sun itself. As he stalks on the battle-field, it seems as if he is the King of Terrors in human form.”†

He fought on unmindful of his wounds and many a time had to be brought back in a senseless condition from the battle-field. But when he recovered his

* The *Adhyātam* : VI. 11.

रथोऽयं देवराजेन प्रेषितो विजयाय ते ।
अमेघं कवचं खड्गं दिव्यतूणीयुगं धनुः ॥

Also *Vālmiki* : VI. 105.

उपागम्याब्रवीद्रामम् अगस्त्यो भगवांस्तदा ।
गृहाणेदं महाबाहो गुह्यं शत्रुविनाशनम् ॥

† *Vālmiki* : VI. 59.

आदित्य इव दुष्प्रेक्ष्यस्तेजोभिर्भाति रावणः ।
भूतैः परिवृतैस्तीक्ष्णैर्देहवद्भिरिवान्तकः ॥

consciousness, he refused to lie in bed and returned to the fight breathing freely, though bleeding profusely. His rebuke to the charioteer is worth quoting :—

“With whose permission did you bring me away ? Do you take me effeminate, weak, or afraid of death ? I would rather perish facing my enemy than seek safety by turning my back. Take me straight to the battlefield again and remember that Rāvaṇa never returns home except as a victor crowned with laurels, or as a corpse bestrewn with flowers.”*

Thus fighting manfully for eighteen days, unconquerable as ever in spirit, he died at last a hero's death.† He was great. While he lived, he rose to the zenith of power and prosperity. His race had been lying in obscurity since the battle of Tripurī; he raised it to conspicuous heights by tremendous effort. Such was the magnificence of his rule that the island of Laṅkā under him came to be spoken of as paved with slabs of gold. He possessed irresistible prowess, but lacked liberal policy; hence though he allowed the Aryan kings to retain their thrones

* *Vālmāki* : VI. 104.

हीनवीर्यमिवाशक्तं पौरुषेण विवर्जितम् ।
मामवज्ञाय दुर्बुद्धे रथोऽयमपवाहितः ।
यशो वीर्यं च तेजश्च प्रत्ययो मे विनाशितः ।
रथं शीघ्रमिमं सूत राघवाभिमुखं नय ।
नाहत्वा समरे शत्रून् निवर्तिष्यति रावणः ॥

† *The Agniveśyā* :—

अष्टादशदिनै रामो द्वैरथे रावणं वधीत् ।
द्वादश्याः शुक्लपक्षस्य यावत्कृष्णचतुर्दशीम् ॥

after surrender, he failed to establish his empire in the hearts of Aryan people. He was satisfied that they feared him and never cared if they loved him not. But when the edge of his sword was skilfully turned by Rāma and he had nothing to fall back upon, he ruefully remembered the words of Anarāya :—

“Though I die a victim to your brute force, yet the spirit of freedom is immortal. It will assert itself in due course and, through my scion, destroy you root and branch.”*

Nevertheless he was great. According to his lights he did his best to retrieve the fortunes of his race and to recover from the Aryans what he honestly felt was unjustly wrested by them from his forefathers. In the words of Stevenson, he meant well, did his best, and if he failed, was a faithful failure. If we judge him from this point of view, he ranks much higher than Alexander whom history calls Great in spite of overrunning countries which had done him no harm, much higher than Napoleon who is styled Great in spite of deposing hereditary kings and putting his underlings in their place. The following elegy sung by Vibhishana over his grave sums up his qualities :—

* *Vālmāki* : VI. 60.

उत्पत्स्यते हि मद्रक्षो तेन त्वं निहनिष्यसे ।
इत्युक्तमनरण्येन इक्ष्वाकुकुलजेन यत् ॥
यथोक्तं तन्मया प्राप्तं, मोघं मे परमं तपः ।
यत्समानो महेन्द्रेण मानुषेण विनिर्जितः

“He enjoyed the pleasures of life to the full, relieved the needy of their wants, rewarded the servants with liberal gifts, was kind to his friends and bitter to his foes. He pursued knowledge with a zest, worshipped the sublime with reverence, was bold in his undertakings and firm in his austerities.”*

Even Rāma pays him the following tribute of praise: —

“With his valour blazing hot as ever, his courage unflinching, and his energy inexhaustible, he fought upto the last moment with supreme self-confidence and in utter disregard of death. He was far and away the greatest hero of his time. He perished no doubt, but not through weakness of nerve, but entirely by adverse turn of fate. War is after all a game of chance and no one can claim victory as his birthright; for the slightest thing may turn the scale in favour of one or the other. I may as well have been slain by him as he has been by me. However, with

* *Vālmiki* : VI. 109.

अनेन दत्तानि वनीपकेषु
 भुक्ताश्च भोगा निभृताश्च भृत्याः ।
 धनानि मित्रेषु समर्पितानि
 वैराण्यमित्रेषु निपातितानि ।
 एषो हिताग्निश्च महातपाश्च
 वेदान्तगः कर्मसु चाग्न्यश्वरः ॥

वनीपक = suppliant.

his death terminates all my enmity with him. I shed a tear for him as though he were my own brother. Let due honours be paid to his remains.”*

But in spite of this the name Rāvaṇa connotes to the Indian masses nothing but what is evil, what is sinful, what is despicable. Why ? A fair-minded critic in ancient India solved the puzzle with remarkable insight, and in solving it also warned us against the wonderful power of propaganda. He says :—

“While the glory of Rāvaṇa has shrunk to insignificance, that of Rāma has swelled out of all proportion. Both were extraordinary in their own way and worked honestly for the exaltation of their respective races. But in spite of the sameness of their merits there has been a vast difference in respect of their fame. This is all due to the magic pen of Vālmīki. Therefore, O ye rulers of earth, beware of poets ! It does not matter what you actually are, but how you have

* *Vālmīki* : VI. 109.

नायं विनष्टो निश्चेष्टः समरे चण्डविक्रमः ।
 अत्युन्नतमहोत्साहः पतितोऽयमशंकितः ।
 नैकान्तिकजयो युद्धे भूतपूर्वः कथञ्चन ।
 परैर्वा हन्यते वीरः परान्वा हन्ति संयुगे ।
 मरणान्तानि वैराणि निवृत्तं नः प्रयोजनम् ।
 क्रियतामस्य संस्कारो ममाप्येष यथा तव ।

been painted by them. What you achieve in your lifetime may perish hereafter, but what these poets write in their books will live for ever. And what you have been shown in their immortal works will go down to eternity as gospel truth.”*

1 *Bilhana* :— लङ्कापतेः संकुचितं यशो यद्
 यत्कीर्तिपात्रं रघुराजपुत्रः ।
 स सर्व एवादिकवेः प्रभावो
 न वञ्चनीया कवयः क्षितीन्द्रैः ॥
 महीपतेः सन्ति न यस्य पाद्वे
 कवीश्वरास्तस्य कुतो यशांसि ।
 भूपाः कियन्तो न बभूवुर्गुर्या
 नामापि जानाति न कोऽपि तेषाम् ॥

CHAPTER VIII

The Catastrophe

After the death of Rāvaṇa, Vibhīṣhaṇa was installed according to previous agreement on the throne of Laṅkā. Both he and Sugrīva accompanied Rāma to Ayodhyā, where they attended his coronation and made obeisance to him as their suzerain lord. Always courteous and never supercilious, Rāma treated them as his equals, introduced them to all as his truest friends,* and entertained them most cordially while they stayed. At the time of departure they had the rare honour of being presented with tokens of regard at the hands of Sītā herself !† Naturally they returned to their respective kingdoms fully pleased with themselves, without any sense of humiliation which alone is the cause of all bitterness between the conquerors and the conquered. The result was that in course of time the Rākshasas and the Vānaras imbibed the culture and civilisation

* *Kālidāsa* : XIII.

दुर्जातबन्धुरयम् ऋक्षहरीश्वरो मे ।
पौलस्त्य एष समरेषु पुरः प्रहर्ता ।
इत्याद्यतेन कथितौ रघुनन्दनेन ॥

† *Ibid* : XIV.

सीतास्वहस्तोपहृताग्न्यपूजान् ।
रक्षःकपीन्द्रान् विससर्ज रामः ॥

of the Aryans and ceased to exist as separate peoples. The astounding achievements of Rāma, coupled with his liberal policy, led to willing acceptance of his paramountcy all over India. A few partisans of Rāvaṇa, such as Lavaṇāsura, went underground and from there carried on their subversive activities for some time.* But they were soon exterminated by Śatrughna, who thereafter came to be classed as a hero along with his twin-brother, the famous conqueror of Indrajit. Having established peace and order within the empire, Rāma then turned his attention to its North-Western Frontier, from where hordes of rapacious invaders have, time after time, poured into the smiling plains of Hindustan owing to sheer negligence of our native rulers in the past. The country of the upper Indus was at this time occupied by a turbulent people, the Gandharvas, whom Yudhājit, the king of Kekaya, had been unable to subdue.† At his request, therefore, Bharata was sent there, and he not only vanquished them

* *Kālidāsa* : XV.

मुनयो यमुनाभाजोऽभ्ययुर्लवणपीडिताः ।
आदिदेशाथ शत्रुघ्नं तेषां क्षेमाय राघवः ।
स हत्वा लवणं वीरस्तदा मेने महौजसः ।
भ्रातुःसोदर्यमात्मानमिन्द्रजिद्वधशोभिनः ॥

† *Vālmiki* : VII. 100.

अयं गन्धर्वविषयः फलमूलोपशोभितः ।
सिंधोरुभयतः पार्श्वे देशः परमशोभनः ।
तं च रक्षन्ति गन्धर्वाः सायुषा युद्धकोविदाः ।
तान् विनिर्जय काकुत्स्थ, गतिर्नान्यस्य तत्र वै ॥

but also disarmed them for good, putting the lute in place of the sword in their hand.* In this way the truculent tribe of the Gandharvas took to minstrelsy and dispersed into bands of musicians all over the world.

The last days of Rāma were exceedingly unhappy. And so were those of many heroes of history, who bent the destinies of nations in their lifetime and rose to heights of power and prosperity by ways which only the ends they sought could justify, but which justice itself must call unscrupulous and bloodstained : Witness the fate of Alexander and Napoleon, Ghazni and Ghory, Dupleix and Clive, Bismarck and Kaiser, Hitler and Mussolini ! Indeed,

* *Kālidāsa* : XV.

भरतस्तत्र गंधर्वान् युधि निर्जित्य केवलम् ।
आतोद्यं ग्राहयामास समत्याजयदायुधम् ॥

* *Vālmiki* : VII. 101.

निवेशयामास तदा समृद्धे द्वे पुरोत्तमे ।
तक्षं तक्षशिलायां तु पुष्कलं पुष्कलावते ।
गन्धर्वदेशे रुचिरे गान्धारविषये च सः ॥

N. B. Taksha and Pushkala were the two sons of Bharata, who were posted respectively in Takshaśilā, near-about Rawalpindi or Peshawar, and in Pushkalāvata, nearabouts Attock on the Western bank of the Indus. Gandhāra is the modern Kandahar. The adjectives used in connection with the country of the Gandharvas, namely, splendid, fruitful, blessed by Nature, exceedingly charming, and not easily accessible, point distinctly to Kashmir. Thus Gandharvadeśa seems to have comprised Kandahar, the N. W. province, and Kashmir.

there is a good deal of truth in the Greek conception of Nemesis who keeps watch in the Universe and sees that no transgression of Heaven's law goes unchastised. Rāma had deliberately in the beginning made Sītā his pretext for destroying Rāvaṇa root and branch,* and the same Sītā in the end became involuntarily his goddess of retribution to destroy his peace and happiness for ever ! Indeed, no sooner had he held the sceptre of universal sovereignty in his hand than the dart of divine vengeance entered his soul and remained there rankling till his death.† His own subjects, who had received him back with open arms, grumbled about his having received Sītā back into his arms. They strongly suspected her character and somehow felt that she

* The *Adhyātma* : II. 1.

सीतामिषेण तं दुष्टं सकुलं नाशयाम्यहम् ॥

Also the *Kūrma* : सृष्ट्वा मायामयीं सीतां स रावणवधेच्छया ॥

† *Bhavabhūti* : नूतनस्य मे राज्ञः संप्रति विपर्यस्तो जीवलोकः । अद्या-
वसितं जीवितप्रयोजनं रामस्य । शून्यमधुना जीर्णारण्यं जगत् । असारः
संसारः । कष्टप्रायं शरीरम् । अशरणोऽस्मि । किं करोमि, का गतिः ।
दुःखसंवेदनायैव रामे चैतन्यमर्पितम् । मर्मोपघातिभिः प्राणैर्वज्रकील-
यितं हृदि ॥

i. e. Alas ! No sooner do I ascend the throne than have I to abandon my dear Sītā ! The world has suddenly turned topsy-turvy for me. The very purpose of my existence is now over. The earth now looks to me an unweeded garden that runs to seed : things rank and gross in nature possess it completely. Life has no charms for me. My body is doomed to tortures. To whom shall I look ? Alas ! Consciousness was implanted in me to suffer pain only : life is as it were a dart of adamant driven into my heart to lacerate its vitals.

had yielded to the seductions of Rāvaṇa. Therefore they wished her expulsion from the royal family, lest their own wives should claim immunity from chastisement for similar license by reference to her. That Rāma should continue to bestow his caresses upon one who was obviously faithless to him filled them with dismay. Whispers of discontent buzzed throughout the city.* When these were reported to him by his spies, he could hardly believe his own ears. Therefore to ascertain the truth of the matter he consulted the members of his inner circle, and when they also testified to the correctness of the report, his heart sank within him.† For, to escape from public censure there was no other way left open to him but to cast her away callously.

Here two questions arise before us. Firstly, were the subjects of Rāma really so uncharitable that instead of feeling compassionate towards their own queen, who was still smarting under the recollections of her abduction, they should desire her banishment

* *Vālmiki* : VII. 43.

शृणु राजन्यथा पौराः कथयन्ति शुभाशुभम् ।
चत्वारापणरथ्यासु वनेषूपवनेषु च ।
कीदृशं हृदि रामस्य सीतासंभोगजं सुखम् ।
लंकामपि पुरा नीतामंकमारोप्य रक्षसा ।
रक्षसां वशमापन्नां कथं रामो न कुत्स्यति ।
अस्माकमपि दारेषु सहनीयं भविष्यति ॥

† *Ibid* : VII. 43.

उवाच सुहृदः सर्वान् कथमेतद्वदन्तु माम् ।
सर्वे ते शिरसा भूमौ अभिवाद्य प्रणम्य च ।
प्रत्यून्तू राघवं दीनमेवमेतन्न संशयः ॥

from society to solitude, where she would again be an easy prey to the beasts of prey and to brutes in human form ! Some of the later poets have seen this point and therefore, in order to save the people of Ayodhyā from the charge of inhumanity, they have, in place of Vālmiki's account, substituted another story of their own invention. They say that a certain washerman, whose wife had stayed one night at her father's place without his knowledge, turned her out of doors with these words that he would never allow her to cross the threshold of his house again, though Rāma might shamelessly take his Sita back in spite of her six months' stay with a stranger. When these words, they say, were reported to Rāma by his spies, he was cut to the quick and forthwith decided upon the abandonment of his innocent spouse. This story does no doubt absolve the public of Ayodhyā from all responsibility in the tragedy that followed, but it does great injustice to Rāma as a constitutional monarch; for in taking such a vital step in life he is said to have acted upon the ravings of a single domestic tyrant and in utter disregard of the feelings of his honourable citizens. We have therefore to reject this story as spurious and puerile, and stick to Vyāsa, Vālmiki and Kālidāsa. Even Bhavabhūti, who has tampered with Vālmiki's narrative in several places, says that it is the citizens as a whole who compelled Rāma to act against his conscience : Witness the soliloquy he puts into the mouth of Rāma:—

“O ye inhabitants of towns and villages !
Since you did not approve of my queen's stay

with me in the same house, I cast her away like a piece of straw in a tenantless forest and did not even mourn for her openly; I simply nursed my grief in private”*

Also,

“Alas ! It is a great pity that the people have to be humoured even in their prejudices by those who want to maintain the good name of their family in public.”†

Thus my first question stands : Were the subjects of Rāma only thoughtless fanatics in demanding the expulsion of their ideal king's wife ?

Secondly, if Rāma knew his wife to be absolutely pure and his subjects altogether in error, should he allow their strictures to upset his sense of justice and humanity to such an extent that having rescued her honourably from the clutches of a brutal tyrant, he should throw her away dishonourably to

* *Bhavabhūti* : III:

हे भवन्तः पौरजानपदाः ।

न किल भवतां देव्याः स्थानं गृहे ऽभिमतं ततस् ।

तृणमिव वने शून्ये त्यक्ता न चाप्यनुशोचिता ॥

† Ibid : I.

कष्टं जनः कुलधनैरनुरञ्जनीयः ।

‡ Ibid : III.

ज्योत्स्नामयीव मृदुबालमृणालकल्पा ।

क्रव्याद्भिरङ्गलतिका नियतं विलुप्ता ॥

i. e. ‘Her delicate body, made up, as it were, of moonbeams or lotus fibres, must have been finished off by now by the eaters of raw flesh.’ This is said by Rāma who had turned her out of the palace on the pretext of sending her out on a pleasure excursion ! Could such a procedure be even called honourable ?

the monsters of the forest‡—he who had mercifully reclaimed Ahalyā from her sinful state, and reconciled her to her husband who had dropped her petrified with horror at the sudden exposure of her guilty amours ? The later writers have failed to appreciate this christian virtue of Rāma's and therefore have represented Ahalyā as an innocent woman, grossly deceived by Indra, unjustly turned to stone by Gautama, and accidentally restored to her former self by the touch of Rāma's foot. But Vālmiki's account is different, free from miracle and consistent with human nature. He says that Ahalyā recognised Indra at once, though he had put on the garb of an ascetic; but instead of spurning his advances, she fell directly into his arms—thrilling with pride that her beauty should have set aflame the heart of so great a personage as the king of Heaven* ! Passionate by nature and wedded to a homely hermit against her will, she enjoyed to her heart's content the caresses of her heavenly paramour.† Unfortunately Gautama returned home from his ablutions a little

* *Vālmiki* : I. 48.

मुनिवेषं सहस्राक्षं विज्ञाय रघुनन्दन ।
मतिं चकार दुर्मैघा देवराजकुतूहलत् ॥

The *Tilaka* on the above : देवराजोऽपि मामभिलषतीति कौतुकात्सा
कामुकी अहल्या तेन सह रन्तुमियेष ।

† *Vālmiki* : I. 48.

अथाब्रवीत्सुरश्रेष्ठं कृतार्थेनान्तरात्मना ।
कृतार्थास्मि सुरश्रेष्ठ गच्छ शीघ्रमितः प्रभो ।
इन्द्रस्तु प्रहसन् वाक्यमहल्यामिदमब्रवीत् ।
सुश्रोणि परितुष्टोऽस्मि गमिष्यामि यथागतम् ॥

too soon. Their confusion gave rise to suspicion and drew his attention perforce to the marks of dalliance on their bodies. In wrath he actually mutilated Indra and abandoned Ahalyā in a desolate place to suffer the torments of hunger and thirst, of shame and remorse.* In this helpless state she was discovered by Rāma, who took pity upon her and, seeing that her nature was purified by the fire of repentance, reunited her with her husband.† Thus my second question stands : if Rāma could be so compassionate towards a fallen woman, should he be so cruel to his own innocent wife ?

When Rāma was informed of the scandalous talk going on everywhere about Sitā, why did he not convene a public meeting of his subjects, as his father had done before, and give them a straight talk as follows :—

‘Ye Citizens of Ayodhyā, my dear but benighted children ! Do you pretend to know Sitā better than I do,—she who had discarded all royal comforts for my sake and forgotten the ills of forest life in the

* Idid : 1. 48. पेतुर्वृषणौ भूमौ सहस्राक्षस्य तत्क्षणात् ।
तथा शप्त्वा च वै शक्रं भार्यामपि च शप्त्वान् ।
वातभक्षा निराहारा तप्यन्ती भस्मशायिनी ।
अदृश्या सर्वभूतानामाश्रमे ऽस्मिन्वसिष्यसि ॥

i. e. the testicles of Indra fell to the ground, and Ahalyā was subjected to starvation.

† Ibid : I. 48. गौतमो ऽपि महातेजा अहल्यासहितः सुखी ।
रामं संपूज्य विधिवत्तपस्तेपे महातपाः ॥

delights of my company,* who according to the testimony of Trijaṭā was left alone by Rāvaṇa to nurse her own grief,† who on the evidence of Hanūmān was reduced to skin and bone, and changed out of all recognition by pining for me ?‡ That Sītā is inseparable from me. She and I have but one heart, one mind, and one soul.§ Hence if you tear her away from me, you will leave us both bleeding for the rest of our lives.¶ Therefore if you

* *Bhavabhūti* : II.

त्वया सह निवत्स्यामि वनेषु मधुगन्धिषु ।
इतीहारमतैवासौ स्नेहस्तस्याः स तादृशः ॥

† *Valmiki* : V. 22.

उपगम्य ततः क्षिप्रं, 'सीतया किं तवानया ।
विवर्णया कृपणया मानुष्या राक्षसेश्वर ।
अकामां कामयानस्य शरीरमुपतप्यते' ।
एवमुक्तस्तु राक्षस्या समुत्क्षिप्तस्ततो बली ॥

i. e. Then she drew near Rāvaṇa and said, 'Why do you bother about this Sītā? See how dark in complexion and gloomy at heart she is. To expect enjoyment from one who does not love you at all is to consume our own body with vain desires.' Thus addressed, Rāvaṇa turned back at once and let Sītā alone.

‡ *Valmiki* : V. 15.

तस्य संदिदिहे बुद्धिस्तथाभूतां निरीक्ष्य च ।
पीडितां दुःखसन्तप्तां परिक्षीणां तपस्विनीम् ॥

§ *Bhavabhūti* : III.

त्वं जीवितं त्वमसि मे हृदयं द्वितीयम् ।
त्वं कौमुदी नयनयोरमृतं त्वमङ्गो ॥

¶ *Ibid* : III. हा प्रिये जानकि क्वासि ! कष्टं भो कष्टम् ।

दलति हृदयं गाढोद्वेगं, द्विधा न तु भिद्यते ।
प्रहरति विधिर्मर्मच्छेदी न कृन्तति जीवितम् ॥

(Continued on next page)

do not want her to be with me, you cannot expect me to be with you. I again repeat that you will either have me with her or not have me at all. I am not particularly attached to this kingdom of Kośala. You already know that I renounced it like chaff at the wishes of Kaikeyī. You also know that I conquered the much bigger empire of Rāvaṇa by the prowess of my arms and gave it away as a gift to Vibhīṣaṇa. Still the earth is vast enough, where I can carve out a kingdom of my own choice, and with Sītā live in a paradise of peace, honour, and joy. Pray do not for a moment think that I intend to leave you to your fate. I have seen to that part of my duty as your king. I am fully confident that you will be safe in the hands of Bharata who has already won your affections by his selfless administration for the last fourteen years. He will be assisted by his two brothers, Lakshmaṇa and Śatrughna, who have already immortalised their name as heroes. The empire is now so well consolidated from Gandhāra in the north-west to Laṅkā in the south that I scent no danger from any quarter in the near or distant future. Thus I assure you that by my abdication, your interests will not in the least suffer. But, I am afraid, by my stay here on your conditions, my conscience will suffer most. Indeed, in the eyes of Heaven I shall be guilty of glaring injustice

(Continued from the previous page)

i. e. Where art thou, my darling ! In tense agony does this heart of mine crack, but breaks not in twain. Fate cuts me to the quick, but cuts not the thread of my life.

to the most innocent soul on Earth.*

‘I admit that the king is a servant of the people and must therefore respect their wishes.† But he is also their master and must therefore see that their wishes do not run counter to reason and sense.‡ If the king does not exercise his judgement and allows himself to be led blindly by the hydra-headed multitude, his kingdom will soon be a pandemonium and his majesty a mere jest. Your present wishes involve wanton cruelty to a blameless person. The being carried off forcibly is certainly a stigma upon one’s honour, and that stigma has been wiped off, as you already know, with the blood of the abductor’s whole family. But if you say that it is also the defilement of one’s heart, character, and chastity, I do not agree with you. Even in the Kṛta age when Urvasī was carried off by the demon Keśī, Purūravas having chivalrously rescued her took her to wife. However, I cannot force you to pay homage to Sītā against your will, nor can you force me to part with her against my conscience. When I took her hand in

* *Manu* : VIII.

अदण्डयान्दण्डयन् राजा दण्डयांश्चैवाप्यदण्डयन् ।

अयशो महदाप्नोति नरकं चैव गच्छति ॥

i. e. By punishing the innocent and sparing the guilty the king incurs infamy and goes to hell.

† *Kalidāsa* : IV. राजा प्रकृतिरञ्जनात् ।

i. e. A king is called Rājā because of his primary duty to keep the subjects contented.

‡ *Ibid* : I. प्रजानां विनयाधानाद्रक्षणान्दरणात् पिता ।

i. e. A King is also a father to his people, because he has to liberalise their outlook and guard them from error.

marriage before the sacred fire, I swore that I would ever be a true, dutiful, and loving husband to her. That solemn oath you should not expect me to break for the sake of this throne of Ayodhyā. Indeed, I have no desire to rule over the people who have no faith in my convictions, nor conviction in my wife's faith. Therefore adieu, Ye citizens ! Now I ask my darling to entwine her arm around my neck,* and thus do we both depart from here to seek our fortune and our happiness elsewhere. Farewell !”

If Rāma had addressed the people thus, it would have surely taken the foul breath from their mouth and brought them a rolling to his feet. But such was the irony of fate that he could not look his own subjects full in the face and defend his chaste wife from their slanderous charge. Herein lies the tragedy of Rāma's life. He had made use of a false Sītā to destroy Rāvaṇa, and though that false Sītā had nobly sacrificed herself in the fire at Laṅkā in order that with a bright face the real Sītā might live with Rāma for ever, yet ultimately it so turned out that

* *Bhavabhūti* : I.

तेन हि निरन्तरमवलम्बस्व मामनुगमनाय ।

जीवयन्निव ससाध्वसश्रम —

स्वेदविन्दुरधिकण्ठमर्प्यताम् ।

बाहुरैन्दवमयूखचुम्बित —

स्यन्दिचन्द्रमणिहारविभ्रमः ॥

i. e. Cling to me closely, my dear, and come along with me. Let your arm, bedewed with perspiration on account of excitement and fatigue, and therefore having the grace of a jewelled necklace dripping under the rays of the moon, be thrown about my neck to put new life as it were into my soul.

neither *she* could be saved from the disgrace of abandonment, nor *he* from the mortification of injustice. Herein applies my reference to Nemesis who spares none, howsoever great, if he swerves even a little from Truth. But how did this curious situation arise? Why did the public discontent strike him dumb, and leave him no other alternative but to act against his own conscience? The answer to this question requires a careful consideration of the circumstances under which Rāvaṇa had carried off the so-called Sītā with ease.

Just prior to her abduction the behaviour of this false Sītā was so witless as to be unworthy of the intelligent daughter of Janaka and so atrocious as to be unbecoming to the kindly sister-in-law of Lakshmaṇa. It is this which aroused a strong suspicion in the outside world that Sītā must have fallen under the glamour of Rāvaṇa's magnificence* and therefore, in order to elope with him quietly, had purposely got rid of her husband first and then her husband's brother. Indeed, at the sight of the artificial deer, fashioned and mechanised skilfully by the Rākshasa artisans for Rāvaṇa, Sītā had simply

* *Vālmīki* : VII. 43.

कीदृशं हृदये तस्य सीतासंभोगजं सुखम् ।
लंकापि पुरा नीतामंकरामोप्य रक्षसा ।
रक्षसां वशमापन्नां कथं रामो न कुत्स्यति ॥

Here the citizens of Laṅkā say, 'What pleasure does his heart really feel in embracing such a wife as Sītā? We are amazed to find that he does not detest her whom Rāvaṇa had carried to Laṅkā in his own arms, and who had lived completely under his influence !'

gone mad with a desire to have it. She pressed Rāma to pursue it and bring it alive, or at least kill it and bring its skin. The skin would do well for a blouse;* how lovely she would look in it! Or the skin might serve as a fine carpet to cover her bed of straw;† how delightful it would be to lie upon it and talk delicious nonsense with Rāma!

Rāma was so charmed by her enthusiasm that without further thought he made ready to go out, bow in hand. Lakshmaṇa, who had hitherto held his tongue, could no longer keep quiet. What surprised him most was not that Sītā should be fascinated by the deer, but that Rāma should fall under the spell of both, and mistake an obviously dangerous artifice for a lucky sport of nature. He therefore assumed sternness and warned Rāma in the presence of Sītā in these terms‡ :—

* *Anonymous* : A Marāthi song :—

कंचुकिचा बाइ मला छंद लागला ।

राम निघुनि गेले म्हणुनि मारण्या मृगा ॥

† *Vālmiki* : III. 43.

निहतस्यास्य सत्वस्य जांबूनदमयत्वचि ।

शष्पवृस्यां विनीतायामिच्छाम्यहमुपासितुम् ॥

शष्पवृसी = a coarse fabric of plaited grass used by ascetics for sitting and sleeping; a mat.

‡ *Vālmiki* : III. 42 and 43.

हेमराजतवर्णाभ्यां पार्श्वभ्यामुपशोभितः ।

मणिप्रवरशृंगाग्रो रत्नपद्मोत्पलाननः ।

वैदूर्यसंकाशखुरस्तनुजंघः सुसंहितः ।

इन्द्रायुधसवर्णेन पुच्छेनोर्ध्वं विराजितः ।

मृगो ह्येवंविधो रत्नविचित्रो नास्ति राघव ।

जगत्यां जगतीनाथ मायैषा न हि संशयः ॥

“Open your eyes, my brother, and see for yourself how unnatural this animal is ! Can such deer ever exist in God’s creation—with the body of gold bespangled with silver, with hoofs of emerald, horns of sapphire, eyes of ruby, and a tail displaying the gorgeous colours of a rainbow ? Since it is artificial, it is unquestionably a contrivance of the enemy to lure us and lead us into a trap. Let us therefore be on our guard and watch its further moves. Leave it alone for the present.”

But Sitā refused to listen to the voice of reason; on the contrary she became all the more insistent.* Like a giddy-headed girl she frisked about Rāma, clapped her hands, implored him, ogled at him, feigned anger, and did all that a Delilah would do to have her wish. Rāma, whom neither the appeals of his dying father nor the pathetic cry of his Bharata could soften, was now moved by her juvenile hilarity. He said to Lakshmana† :—

* *Vālmīki* : III. 43.

एवं ब्रुवाणं सौमित्रिं प्रतिवार्य शुचिस्मिता ।
उवाच सीता संहृष्टा मृगो हरति मे मनः ॥

† *Ibid* : III. 43.

पश्य लक्ष्मण वैदेह्याः स्पृहामुल्लसितामिमाम् ।
कस्य रत्नमयो नाम न मनो लोभयेन्मृगः ।
अर्थी येनार्थकृत्येन संव्रजत्यविचारयन् ।
तमर्थमर्थशास्त्रज्ञाः प्राहुरर्थ्याः सुलक्ष्मण ।
एतस्य मृगरत्नस्य परार्धे काञ्चनत्वचि ।
उपवेक्ष्यति वैदेही मया सह सुमध्यमा ।
इह त्वं भव सन्नद्धो यन्त्रितो रक्ष मैथिलीम् ।
हत्वैतच्चर्म आदाय शीघ्रमेष्यामि लक्ष्मण ॥

"Well, what you say may be true. But somehow I am inclined to agree with Sītā that the deer in front is a precious animal and worth having at all costs. Fortune favours the brave and the brave despise all risks. After all my darling has sacrificed so much on my account that in return I must at least grant her this wish. However I shall take your hint and stalk the deer warily. Have no fear on my account. You stay behind and guard Sītā vigilantly. Stand rooted to this spot and do not stir from this place on any account until I return."

Some time after the departure of Rāma a piercing shriek was heard, 'Alas ! O Sītā : Help ! O Lakshmaṇa.' These words were in mortal agony uttered by Mārīcha who was sitting inside the deer to control its movements and hold Rāma in play, as Ulysses lay hidden inside the wooden horse to effect entry into the citadel of Troy, or as the agents of Pradyota lay concealed within the iron elephant to take Udayana captive by surprise.* Lakshmaṇa was so familiar with the voice of Rāma that its clever imitation by Mārīcha could not escape his detection. He twitched his face a little and remained still. But Sītā seemed smitten with anxiety for her lord's life. She importuned Lakshmaṇa to leave her alone and run to the rescue of his brother. But he refused to budge an inch. He said :—

"I am rather surprised to see you so easily taken in by mere imitation. You have yourself

* *Bhāṣa's Pratijñayaugandharāyaṇa.*

witnessed the powers which Rāma, single-handed against many, has displayed on several occasions before. This at least, I expect, you have not forgotten. How do you, then, think it possible that today the matchless Rāma has been out-matched by the enemy? Compose yourself, Madam, and be at ease. ”*

At these sensible words Sītā lost her sense and her temper completely. In fact, she went off her head and ceased to be her usual self. Without the slightest justification for it, she spoke daggers to Lakshmaṇa, which cut up his very vitals. She charged him openly with malignant intentions towards his brother and with incestuous motives towards herself. She said† :—

* *Vālmiki* : III. 45.

न स तस्य स्वरो व्यक्तं न कश्चिदपि दैवतः ।
राक्षसा विविधा वाचो व्याहरन्ति महावने ।
न्यासभूतासि वैदेहि न त्वां त्यक्तुमिहोत्सहे ।
अशक्यस्तव वैदेहि भर्ता जेतुं न संशयः ।
अनिवार्यं बलं तस्य बलैर्बलवतामपि ।
अवध्यः समरे रामो न चिन्तयितुमर्हसि ॥

† *Vālmika* : III. 45.

व्यसनं ते प्रियं मन्ये स्नेहो भ्रातरि नास्ति ते ।
इच्छसि त्वं विनश्यन्तं रामं लक्ष्मण मत्कृते ।
मम हेतोः प्रतिच्छन्नः नृशंस कुलपांसन ।
अनार्यं करुणारंभं प्रयुक्तो भरतेन वा ।
सुदुष्टस्त्वं वने राममेकमेकोऽनुगच्छसि ।

(Continued on next page)

"I have long known you to be despicable at heart. You followed us in exile not to serve your brother but to slay him, not to guard his wife but to grab her. Working secretly for Bharata, you want to rid him of his possible rival to the throne; and coveting the charms of my body, you wish to have me at your mercy as a helpless widow. But remember, you villain, I shall rather embrace fire than let you hold me in your arms. Away with you ! I hate the very sight of your face."

As she raved thus, she tore her hair, beat her breasts, and cried her loudest.

Lakshmaṇa was stunned at this outburst. How often during the last thirteen years of forest life he had remained alone with her at the behest of Rāma ! But at no time did Sītā betray even a hint of suspicion about his character. What had now come upon her who was always so kind and considerate, guileless and sweet, noble and generous ! He could disregard the first charge of treachery, because it concerned his relations with Rāma and Bharata, and they both would strongly testify to the contrary. But the second charge of lechery entered his soul like a red-hot iron, because it concerned his relations

(Continued from previous page)

पिबामि वा विषं तीक्ष्णं प्रवेक्ष्यामि हुताशनम् ।

न त्वहं राघवादन्यं कदापि पुरुषं स्पृशे ।

एवं लक्ष्मणमाश्रुत्य सीता शोकसमन्विता ।

पाणिभ्यां रुदती शोकादुदरं प्रजघान ह ॥

with Sītā, and her testimony went decidedly against him. He said* :—

“I know that women by nature are narrow in their outlook, malicious at heart, and disposed to rouse discord between brothers. But I have always held you far above them and worshipped you as my mother. Your words today clearly show that you are no exception to the general rule. Standing on the brink of destruction yourself, you are throwing mud upon me. My brother's commands are inviolable to me, but your words are insufferable. What a situation for me ! However, let my brother say to me what he will, but I cannot stay here against your will. May the gods watch over you while I am away, and may we both see you safe and sound on our return ! Adieu.”

From these antecedents of Sītā's abduction it will be clear that the grounds on which the suspicions of the people of Ayodhyā rested were irrefutable. Let us look at the whole affair from their point of view. Sītā's age at this time was at least forty-three. The *Adhyātma* says that her full breasts were distinctly

* *Vālmiki* : III. 45.

न सहे हीदृशं वाक्यं तप्तनाराचसंनिभम् ।
 स्वभावस्त्वेष नारीणामेषु लोकेषु दृश्यते ।
 विमुक्तधर्माश्चपलास्तीक्ष्णा भेदकराः स्त्रियः ।
 धिक् त्वामद्य विनश्यन्तीं यन्मामेवं विशङ्कसे ।
 स्त्रीत्वाद् दुष्टस्वभावेन गुरुवाक्ये व्यवस्थितम् ।
 रक्षन्तु त्वां विशालाक्षि समग्रा वनदेवताः ।
 गच्छामि यत्र काकुत्स्थः स्वस्ति तेऽस्तु वरानने ॥

noticeable from under her wedding garment when she put the auspicious garland on Rāma.* Thus she must have been at least eighteen at the time of her marriage.† Vālmiki says that she had stayed twelve years in Ayodhyā with Rāma before he went into exile.‡ If we add thirteen years and a half of forest life to this, her age at the time of her abduction comes to forty-three years and six months. Thus she was sufficiently grown up to be sober and not flighty, to be able to appreciate the warning of Lakshmana and judge for herself that the deer in front of her eyes was not a natural creation but a mechanical fabrication. Yet she cried for it like a fractious child, she pouted her lips at Lakshmana, and she wheedled Rāma to go in pursuit of it. Naturally the people of Ayodhyā felt that considering her age and her intellectual attainments, her conduct was most unbecoming and purposely designed to send away her husband on a fool's errand. But there still remained one more obstacle in her way—Lakshmana. And him she attacked

* The *Adhyātma* : I. 6.

सीता स्वर्णमयीं मालां वस्त्रान्तर्व्यजितस्तनी ।
रामस्योपरि निक्षिप्य स्मयमाना मुदं ययौ ॥

† *Vālmiki* : III. 47.

अष्टादश हि वर्षाणि मम जन्मनि गण्यते ।

‡ *Ibid* : III. 47.

उषित्वा द्वादश समा इक्ष्वाकूणां निवेशने ।
तत्र त्रयोदशे वर्षे राजामन्त्रयत प्रभुः ।
अभिषेचयितुं रामं समेतो राजमन्त्रिभिः ॥

atrociously in his sensitive spot : she called him a secret spy and a hidden libertine. She had known him for twelve years in Ayodhyā, and during the thirteen years of exile Rāma had often stationed him behind to guard her whenever he went out alone to deal with troublesome night-rovers.* Had she ever detected anything suspicious in his looks and manners before ? Then how was it that on this particular occasion, when his presence was most necessary, it suddenly dawned upon her mind that he was lusting for her ! Did she not know that Rāma was a strict disciplinarian and had ordered Lakshmaṇa to stand rooted to the spot until his return ? Then why did she create such a hysterical scene against him when he refused to disobey those orders ? Was this not therefore her feminine trick to get rid of him somehow ?

Let us ask ourselves the question, namely, whether she who behaved thus could be the real Sītā. If she were, it would be strange that within a year or so after this incident she agreed to go alone

* The *Adhyātma* : III. 5.

सीतां नीत्वा गुहां गत्वा तत्र तिष्ठ महाबल ।

हन्तुमिच्छाम्यहं सर्वान्नाक्षसान्धोररूपिणः ।

अत्र किञ्चिन्न वक्तव्यं शापितोऽसि ममोपरि ।

तथेति सीतामादाय लक्ष्मणो गव्ह्रं ययौ ॥

Here Rāma says to Lakshmaṇa, "Take Sītā to the cave for safety's sake and stay with her until I destroy all these soldiers of Khara. Don't argue, but obey me unhesitatingly in this matter." Thereupon Lakshmaṇa entered the lonely cave with Sītā.

with Lakshmana readily, when Rāma decided to send both on an excursion to the Ganges.* Indeed, no woman who has some modesty left in her would ever go on a pleasure trip with a man whose character she has once cut up hideously and whose feelings she has wounded brutally ! My conviction thus remains unshaken that the Sītā of Ayodhyā, who went innocently alone with Lakshmana for a sojourn on the river bank, was different from the Sītā of Janasthāna, who was suspected to have so contrived as to elope with Rāvana secretly. Who could this be, if the view of miracles is to be rejected ? Obviously Śabarī who at the instructions of Rāma had dedicated her life, her body and soul, to his cause. It was she who, under his tutelage, played the part of an ill-tempered, giddy-headed, and light-minded woman, who first prevailed upon Rāma to run after a trap-deer and then compelled Lakshmana to leave her alone.

Rāma could never confess to his people—and no diplomat who has his wits about him ever would—that what happened in Janasthāna was skil-

* *Vālmiki* : VII. 46.

गंगातीरे मया देवि अवनेया भविष्यसि ।

एवमुक्ता तु वैदेही लक्ष्मणेन महात्मना ।

प्रहर्षमतुलं लेभे गमनं चाप्यरोचयत् ।

सौमित्रिः प्रययौ शीघ्रं रथमारोप्य मैथिलीम् ॥

i. e. When Lakshmana said to Sītā that he had been ordered to take her alone to the bank of the Ganges, she was mightily pleased and rejoiced at the idea of going with him. Lakshmana then helped her into the chariot and drove at full speed.

fully engineered by him to put Rāvaṇa apparently in the wrong and then to destroy him utterly with a show of righteous indignation. Such a confession would bring his own machiavellian policy into the limelight and scrape off the veneer of inevitable necessity from his war of planned aggression. Thus since he could not disprove the grounds on which the suspicions of his own people rested and since he could not repeat the trial by fire to prove the innocence of his dear Sītā, there was no other course but to abandon her. Merely to turn a deaf ear to the buzzing slander would not stop the mouth of the people. To abdicate the throne for her sake would not wipe the stain off her name. On the contrary, it would expose him to public sneer that he was so much under the spell of his wife that, forgetting his own dishonour in her ravishing beauty, he went wagging his tail behind her who had once run away from him, rather than stay with his people who had long been waiting for him.

Herein lay the tragedy of Rāma's later life. He had not let Lakshmaṇa into his secret about the substitution of a false Sītā.* For Lakshmaṇa was a

* *The Adhyātma* : III. 8.

लक्ष्मणस्तत्र जानाति मायासीतां मया कृताम् ।

ज्ञात्वाप्येनं वंचयित्वा शोचामि प्राकृतो यथा ॥

i. e. 'Lakshmaṇa does not know that a false Sītā has been created in place of the real one. He has been kept in the dark, but I know the truth; still I must put up a fine show of grief.' Compare also Tulasi's lines :—

लक्ष्मणहु यह मर्म न जाना ।

जो कछ रचा चरित भगवाना ॥

man of strong likes and dislikes, and from his contemptuous rejection of the food offered by Śabarī,* Rāma had rightly concluded that he would never treat her with the same regard as he showed to Sītā. He would thus unwittingly give away the show, which was not desirable. If left in the dark, there was little possibility of his ever discovering the truth himself; for he carried the idea of moral purity to so fastidious an excess that he never ventured to look at Sītā's face. Having guarded the secret from him then, Rāma did not like to disclose it to him now; for its disclosure would not serve any useful purpose. It might shock Lakshmaṇa to know that he had not been considered worthy of confidence before. Even if he did not take it ill, what way could he suggest to Rāma to wriggle out of the present difficulty. Not gifted with a resourceful mind and being a veritable Hotspur, he would have proposed the wholesale slaughter of the people of Ayodhyā for desiring the abandonment of Sītā, as he had actually done before at the time of Rāma's banish-

† According to one popular legend, Lakshmaṇa flung disdainfully the leafy cup in which Sabarī had offered him fruit. A hill is said to have emerged out of it when it 'fell to the ground. It is the herb from this hill, called Dropāchala, which saved the life of Lakshmaṇa later on in Laṅkā. The story is interesting in so far as it reveals the unsophisticated simplicity of Sabarī and the incapacity of Lakshmaṇa to appreciate it.

ment to the forest.* How could such a drastic step be acceptable to Rāma as the solution of his delicate problem ?

Now it is easy for us to understand why Rāma, having decided upon the abandonment of Sitā, refused to discuss the matter with his brothers. He called them together and spoke to them with a peremptory curtness which was quite unusual with him. He said:—

“By all that is sacred to you, by my very life which you hold so dear, I charge you to listen quietly and do my bidding without question. If you remonstrate with me, I shall take it as an affront to my royal authority. If you seek to conciliate me, you will only succeed in alienating me. Have the goodness to remember that I am never hasty in my action and that my decisions are made after due deliberation, never from impulse. Now to come to the point, you are already aware how my acceptance of Sitā

* *Valmiki* : II. 21.

निर्मनुष्यामिमां सर्वामयोध्यां मनुजर्षभ
करिष्यामि शरैस्तीक्ष्णैर्यदि स्थास्वति विप्रिये ।
भरतस्याथ पक्ष्यो वा यो वास्य हितमिच्छति ।
सर्वस्तांश्च वधिष्यामि मृदुहिं परिभूयते ॥

i. e. “If only one dares to oppose my wishes to see you on the throne, I shall teach him a lesson by laying waste the entire city of Ayodhyā. Whosoever sides with Bharata or wishes him to rise at your cost shall be slain by me outright. Harshness pays in life; whereas meekness leads to humiliation.”

back has caused a public ferment. That she and I must part has become inevitable. She has expressed a desire to pass a few days in the vicinity of the Ganges. And this very day Lakshmana will take her out in a chariot on the pretext of fulfilling her wishes and leave her to her fate on the river's bank. It is, I know, a cruel resolve, but there is no help for it. Raise no objections and ask no questions. Do as I say. Go. ”*

Having considered Rāma's reticence towards his brothers, the next question that compels our attention is, why did he withhold the truth from his wife also and deceive her noble self into eternal gloom in so Mephistophelean a manner? Why did he not tell her frankly what necessitated their separation for ever? It could not be said that he was afraid lest she should fall into hysterics and create an ugly scene for him. He had already had a spontaneous assurance from her that for his sake she would undergo any sacrifice in a just cause. Soon after his ascension to the throne he had set forth before

* *Valmiki* : VIII. 45.

शापिता हि मया यूयं पादाम्ब्यां जीवितेन च ।
 ये मां वाक्यान्तरे ब्रूयुरनुनेतुं कथंचन ।
 अहिता नाम ते नित्यं मदभीष्टविघातनात् ।
 मानयन्तु भवन्तो मां यदि मच्छासने स्थिताः ।
 इतोऽद्य नीयतां सीता कुरुष्व वचनं मम ।
 तस्मात्त्वं गच्छ सौमित्रे नात्र कार्या विचारणा ।
 अप्रीतिर्हि परा मह्यं त्वयैतत्प्रतिवारिते ।
 पूर्वमुक्तोऽहमनया 'गंगातीरेऽहमाश्रमान् ।
 पश्येयमिति' तस्याश्च कामः संवर्त्यतामयम् ॥

her his ideal of kingship, namely, that he would, without a qualm of conscience, give up affection, compassion, and happiness, nay, *even the daughter of Janaka*, in order to propitiate his subjects.* At this she had not betrayed resentment, but expressed full admiration in these words :— ‘*Hence, my lord, you are styled the Most Illustrious Scion of the Solar Race.*’† In spite of this assurance he was not straight with her. He callously turned her out of doors without her being in the least aware of it. Holding the prospect of a sojourn in a vernal wood before her, he lured her away to a terrible doom. Bhavabhūti has rightly emphasised that what Sītā felt most keenly was not her abandonment, but the inhuman way in which it was effected. But he does not make it clear why Rāma adopted this heartless procedure; in fact he is peculiarly silent on this point. Nor have Vālmīki, Vyāsa, and Kālidās even attempted a solution of this riddle. Tulasidāsa has ended his epic with the coronation of Rāma. Obviously he did not like to deal with the gloomy sequel of his glorious career. Western scholars like Talboys Wheeler have jumped to the conclusion that *Rāma, as he advanced in years, became jealous and peevish like Henry the Eighth.*‡ This inference we can never accept, knowing Rāma as we do. Moreover it is quite inconsistent

* *Bhavabhūti* : I.

स्नेहं दयां च सौख्यं च यदि वा जानकीमपि ।
आराधनाय लोकस्य मुञ्चतो नास्ति मे व्यथा ॥

† *Ibid* : I. अत एव राघवकुलधुरंधरः आर्यपुत्रः ।

‡ *History of India* Vol. II. Page 405.

with the fact that even after her abandonment, Sītā remained tenderly enshrined in his heart till the last flicker of his breath. How, then, shall we reconcile this undeniable fact with his seemingly heartless indifference to her ! Why did he not tell her straight-away what compelled him to yield to public pressure against the dictates of his conscience ? If he had taken her into his confidence, they both would have parted, though gloomy in looks, yet cheerful in spirits, and they would have been spared the terrific agonies which each suffered for ever—the one from consciousness of inhuman cruelty; the other from utter ignorance of its motive.

As has been pointed out before, the root of the whole trouble lay in the frivolous conduct of the illusory Sītā. The ruse had been planned by Rāma with the assent of Śabarī to force Lakshmaṇa out of the way, to entice Rāvaṇa into a false step, and to provide himself with a plausible excuse to destroy him root and branch. It had answered his purpose well, but while it possessed the wisdom of political expediency, it lacked the virtue of moral uprightness. He could not defend it before his subjects; nor could he speak of it to his wife. Indeed, how could he tell her that she, a woman on the wrong side of forty, had been represented to the world, through a substitute, as a silly wench, crying obstinately for the skin of a spotted deer and maligning hideously the character of spotless Lakshmaṇa ! How could he disclose to her all that had been planned in her name and behind her back in Janasthāna ! He knew that if she was apprised of the way in which she had

been shown to act to facilitate her abduction,* she would be mortified with shame and resentment. He had not forgotten how in the Daṇḍakā forest she had vehemently deprecated his duplicity in planning the destruction of the Rākshasas under the garb of asceticism. She had said:—

“Be true, my dear, to the vow of renunciation you have taken. View all with an impartial eye and intend no evil to those who mean you no harm. To turn an anchorite and meditate bloodshed is, my dear, a stark hypocrisy which may satisfy ambition but surely paves the way to perdition.”†

Thus Rāma had perceived long ago that though Sītā was born of Earth, she was not earthly. Brought up in a serene and philosophical atmosphere at her father Janaka's place, she lived in a much higher region, far above the world of strife and intrigue;

* The old Marathi poets have invented mythical reasons for the equivocal behaviour of Sītā on this occasion. They say that the gods from heaven implored her to drive out Lakshmana and to walk beyond the barrier which had been put up for her safety, so that Ravana might easily carry her off and thus provide Rāma with a ground to start his premeditated war of Liberation.

† *Vālmiki* : III. 9.

नित्यं शुचिमतिः सौम्य चर धर्म तपोवने ।
 अक्षया मे भवेत्प्रीतिर्यदि त्वं निरतो मुनिः ।
 बुद्धिर्वैरं विना हन्तुं न सा कार्या कथंचन ।
 क्व च क्षात्रं क्व च वनं व्याविद्धमुभयंतिवदम् ।
 कदर्यकलुषा बुद्धिर्नरकस्येह कारणम् ॥

hence she could never accommodate herself to the ways of worldly rise. Her conviction, as she put it in her admonition to Rama, was—“*Remember, my dear, the pursuit of material prosperity leads not to lasting bliss.*”* Indeed, what will it avail us, she meant to say, if we gain the world but lose our soul. Large and sincere was her heart; pure and catholic were her sympathies. Wishing violence to none, inspiring confidence in all, and diffusing love every-where, her musical soul, says Bhavabhūti, drew the animals of the forest around her like Orpheus’ harp. Naturally she would have been horrified to learn that under her name Lakshmana, the spirit of service incarnate, had been wounded in his honour and that for her honour’s sake Śabarī, the image of platonic love, had died in flames.†

The truth is that Sītā was cast in a different mould from Rāma’s. If he lived for the liberation of his race and the uplift of his country, she stood by the glory of truth and love of humanity. He had long realised that he was wedded to a wife whose soul did not confine itself to the narrow limits of the earth, but embraced the whole universe. She belonged to a much higher plane, and he felt awed down by her moral grandeur. He had not the brazen-faced

* *Ibid* : III. 9 सुखं प्रभवते धर्मात्, न सुखाल्लभते सुखम् ।

† The *Kūrma* : सा प्रत्ययाय भूतानां सीता मायामयी ततः ।
विवेश पावकं दीप्तं ददाह ज्वलनोऽपि ताम् ॥

Also *Tulasidāsa* : प्रतिविम्ब और लौकिक कलङ्क ।

प्रचण्ड पावक में जरे ॥

courage to tell her how the equivocal methods employed by him to secure his end had recoiled upon her and brought her irreproachable character into irrefutable reproach. He was stung by shame and remorse. His resourceful mind failed him on this occasion. He did not see any way by which he could honourably avoid separation from her, or even make the inevitable separation honourable to her. For, to abandon her meant confirming the verdict of the people and making the blot on her name indelible ! This was the real tragedy, the cruel mockery of his fate, and it is this which rent his heart in two.

In this distracted state of mind he entered her boudoir and found her asleep. Unaware of the impending crack of doom, a happy smile glimmered on her lips. A clear conscience, undisturbed by outside slanders, lent a halo of light to her sweet face. Aa Rāma gazed upon her, big drops rolled down his cheeks. He said:—

“O artless one ! Why was thy lot cast with mine ! Taking me to be a sandal tree, thou hast clung to a poisonous plant. Leave me, an inhuman wretch as I am.”*

Then suppressing his tears, he drew near her with noiseless steps. But he did not, like Othello, kiss her; for he felt that his foul breath might sully her spotless face. Instead he gently lifted

* *Bhavabhūti* : I.

अपूर्वकर्मचाण्डालम् अयि मुग्धे विमुञ्च माम् ।
श्रितासि चन्दनभ्रान्त्या दुर्विपाकं विषदुमम् ॥

her feet, pressed them to his bosom, and placed them on his head.* This is the most unusual thing in Hindu society. No husband will ever bow to his wife, much less touch her feet with his head. Rāma did. That shows how guilty he felt in his heart of hearts, and how angelic he regarded her in purity of soul !

At this moment the door-keeper from outside announced that an urgent matter awaited His Majesty's pleasure. Instantly he was himself again. With a stern face he came out and attended to the report that a serious trouble, engineered by certain malcontents, had broken out in Mathurā. Forthwith he issued orders that Śatrughna should proceed there with troops. Then he sent word to Lakshmana that he should have the chariot ready to take Sītā out into the jungle as soon as she was awake. If she inquired for him, he was to convey his regrets that State business made it impossible for him to bear her company this time in her excursion to Nature's paradise.

* *Bhavabhūti* : I. देवि देवि ! अयं पश्चिमस्ते रामशिरसा पादपङ्कज-
स्पर्शः । (इति सीतायाः पादौ शिरसि कृत्वा रोदिति ।)

This is how Bhavabhūti's *Uttaracarita* begins and Shakespeare's *Othello* ends. The situation is strikingly similar, with one important difference : Rāma did not doubt the chastity of Sītā, but the outside world did, and he abandoned her : the outside world did not doubt the chastity of Desdemona, but Othello did, and he murdered her. Both suffered intense tortures of the soul at the grave injustice they had done. But while Othello could seek relief in suicide, Rāma had to put on a smiling face in spite of an aching heart within.

The task assigned to Lakshmaṇa was most repugnant to him, but the orders of Rāma were inviolable and he had to execute them. With a set face, though upset in mind, he drove her in a chariot as far as the Ganges, then led her across the river in a boat, and having helped her alight on the southern bank, left her there, helpless and stunned at the doom so unaccountably meted out to her. Doleful and dazed, she wandered aimlessly in the forest, bewailing her stars. A few disciples of Vālmiki, happening to come that way, were moved to compassion at her forlorn state, and gently they escorted her to their Teacher's hermitage, where she lived under the paternal care of the sage, and in due course was safely delivered of twin-sons. When they were weaned, she left them in charge of the sage and herself took the veil. The twins were named Kuśa and Lava, and were brought up as Brahmin boys only. At this time Vālmiki was writing his metrical history of Rāma, and as these boys had excellent memory, he made them learn by heart the verses which he composed each day. In this way, by the time they were twelve years of age, they had Vālmiki's unadulterated Epic on the tip of their tongue. Since it is Kuśa and Lava who first gave publicity to the Rāmāyaṇa by singing portions of it wherever they went, the professional bards who took it over from them afterwards called themselves *Kuśilavas*, which now is a regular Sanskrit word for a reciter of poems or an eulogist. It is necessary to mention here that though the later Sanskrit and

Prakrit poets represent these two boys as masters of all mystic lores, of all arts and sciences, civil and military, yet there is not the remotest suggestion of it in Vālmiki and Vyāsa. These authors only refer to the two boys' ability to repeat from memory the whole of Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa at the age of twelve, as Macaulay did the whole of Milton's Paradise Lost at the same age.

However, when they were about this age, Rāma undertook the performance of a Horse-sacrifice according to usual custom.* To this sacrifice he invited many sages from far and near. Vālmiki was

* The narrative that follows is strictly in accordance with Vālmiki, Vyāsa, and Kalidāsa. Unfortunately Bhavābhūti and his slavish imitators have entirely altered Vālmiki's simple, natural, and truthful account to please their own childish fancy and pamper their love of the marvellous. They say that when the sacrificial horse of Rāma entered Vālmiki's hermitage, these two boys tied it up and refused to give it back. In the terrific battle that ensued all the veteran guardians of the horse, including Lakshmana, Hanūmāna, Aṅgada, were utterly defeated and mortally wounded by these two boys who, according to Vālmiki, had not yet learnt to handle a bow, much less to shoot, and far less to fight big armies. On hearing of this debacle, Rāma is said to have rushed to the battleground. But he also was forthwith worsted, and might have even lost his life but for the timely intervention of Vālmiki and Sītā. In this way these puerile bards have invested the two boys with supernatural powers and divested the renowned heroes of their genuine prowess. It is such fabulous stories which pass for Rāmāyaṇa among the millions of India and make the great Vālmiki turn in his grave. These poets also make Rāvaṇa come to the Svayamvara of Sītā and behave like

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one of them, and he came with a number of his disciples including these two boys. The citizens of Ayodhyā were struck by their close resemblance to Rāma, not only in complexion and features, but also in voice, gait, and bearing. Vālmiki had taught them the verses of his newly composed poem, and as they, at his instance, went round the city, chanting the beautiful lines they had learnt in their sweet accents, crowds of people would gather about them and stand listening with rapt attention. In this way within a few days they became the talk of the whole town.

It was not long before the news of these two lovely boys reached the ears of Rāma. His curiosity being roused, he expressed a wish to see them, and when they were admitted into his presence, he felt unaccountably drawn towards them. A lump rose in his throat, as he heard them recite feelingly the tragic story of his later life. They seemed to voice forth, as it were, the pent up agonies of his heart. He asked them who they were, but they could not tell him anything beyond that they were under the guardianship of Father Vālmiki. He offered them a reward in money, but they said that they

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a clownish braggart who cannot even lift the bow, and therefore sobs and weeps, whines and vomits, and runs away in disgrace ! This is Rāmāyana to many, but they forget that Rāma does not deserve to be glorified for destroying such an imbecile braggadocio ! According to Vālmiki, only Rāma, Lakshmana, and Vishvāmitra were present at Sītā's swayamvara,

had no use for it in a place where Nature supplied all their wants. Having dismissed them, he sought an interview with the sage in private and begged of him to enlighten him on the mystery that surrounded their birth. Thereupon the sage told him the whole truth and pressed him to espouse Sītā back. But he repeated his old argument that unless the people were convinced that her honour was bright, he could neither accept her as his wife, nor own the twins as his sons.* On hearing these words the sage sent for Sītā from the hermitage and called upon Rāma to summon the citizens together. When they were assembled, he asked her to face them. Unconcerned and serene, as she stepped firmly before them, her very looks dispersed the clouds of suspicion from their minds; for though pale and emaciated, her face reflected the purity of her heart, and in her eyes sparkled the inner consciousness of innocence.† None of them had the courage to meet her gaze, and with their heads hanging down in shame, they all stood up and acclaimed with one voice that she was their mother, their queen,—spotless, chaste, and glorious.‡

* *Kalidāsa* : XV.

प्रजाश्चारित्रमुद्दिश्य प्रत्याययतु मैथिली ।

ततः पुत्रवतीमेनां प्रतिपत्स्ये त्वदाज्ञया ॥

† *Kalidāsa* : XV.

काषायपरिवीतेन स्वपदार्पितचक्षुषा ।

अन्वमीयत शुद्धेति शान्तेन वपुषैव सा ॥

‡ *Ibid* : XV.

जनास्तदालोकयथात् प्रतिसंहृतचक्षुषः ।

तस्थुस्तेऽवाङ्मुखाः सर्वे फलिता इव शालयः ॥

Rāma was now perfectly willing to take her back, but she had no wish to go back to him—to him who had cast her away as though she was a dirty broom, without telling her what her fault was, or rather what his own difficulties were. He had denied her his confidence and deceived her into the bargain. Her heart was broken beyond repair. If she held on to life thereafter, it was because she did not wish to die in bad odour that she was but a runaway slut and that her sons were only guttersnipes. But now that her face was brightened and her little ones assured of a legitimate place under their father's roof,* a great load was taken off her mind. She heaved a sigh of relief and with that sigh flew away her life : she dropped dead on the ground before all. Vālmiki, however, says that a miracle happened at this time.† The ground in front of her opened out all of a sudden. Therefrom rose a golden throne with Mother Earth sitting upon it. She received Sitā into her loving arms and vanished into the chasm. Thereafter the ground closed up as before.

Whether Sitā disappeared bodily into the earth or departed spiritually to heaven is a matter of

* *Kālidāsa* : XV.

रामः सीतागतं स्नेहं निदधे तदपत्ययोः ।

† *Vālmiki* : VII. 97.

भूतलादुत्थितं दिव्यं सिंहासनमनुत्तमम् ।
तस्मिंस्तु धरणी देवी बाहुभ्यां गृह्य मैथिलीम् ।
स्वागतेनाभिनन्द्यैनामासने चोपवेशयत् ।
तामासनगतां दृष्ट्वा प्रविशन्तीं रसातलम् ।
पुष्पवृष्टिरविच्छिन्ना दिव्या सीतामवाकित् ॥

little importance. The point worth remembering is that she did not go back to him who had made use of her illusory form to effect his purpose and thus brought her character under a shadow of suspicion, who had first confirmed the suspicion of his people by turning her out of doors and then called upon her to clear herself of all imputations.* She did clear herself by sheer force of virtue, without betraying her husband's closely guarded secret. But after that she had no wish to continue in this world where she had tasted nothing but the bitters of life. Out of the privations of fourteen years' exile she had fallen into the tortures of endless abandonment. She was fed up with this world where people could be so thoughtless as to suspect that the daughter of Janaka could turn a flirt at the age of forty-four and elope with Rāvaṇa at a time when the bloom of her youth was already past. Such a world could never give her that peace and happiness which her soul needed. Hence she cut off at one stroke all the ties that bound her to this life; she shot a glance at Rāma and soared heavenward out of sight, never to meet him again on this side of the grave.†

* *Kalidāsa* : XV.

प्रजाश्चारित्रमुद्दिश्य प्रत्याययतु मैथिली ।

† Bhavabhūti has entirely spoiled the effect by making Sītā rush into the arms of Rāma when he called her back to him at the jubilant shouts of the people. Classical poets generally represent Aryan women as dolls, which may be thrown away and picked up by men at their sweet will, as if they have no sense of self-respect, no personal dignity of their

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Rāma did not and could not get over this terrible shock. He suddenly felt limp in the body and could not stand erect without the support of a staff; his neck hung loosely; he let flow the tears in torrents which he had so far restrained in public : that saved him from the throttling grip of his grief.* He lived a few years more and discharged his kingly duties as efficiently as before. Slackness was not in his nature, and perfunctoriness he abhorred as sin. He carried on the administration of his vast empire with remarkable vigilance, but denied himself all the pleasures which sovereignty placed within his reach. Whenever trouble arose anywhere, he forthwith sent his brothers to deal with it : Witness how Lavaṇāsura was put down by Śatrughna, and the Gandharvas by Bharata. But he himself never drew his bow again. He did not commit Napoleon's mistake of reserving for himself the right to take the lead in every thing; hence his brothers were not

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own. Witness Kālidāsa's *Śakuntala*, where the heroine, in spite of being repudiated in public by her husband as a fornicating wench, goes back to him meekly, without even a show of remonstrance, when he, having no heir to the throne, wants her back for the sake of his own son. Witness also his *Mālavikāgnimitra*, where the two elderly queens gladly consent to the marriage of their fifty-year-old husband with a sixteen-year-old-girl, upon whom he dotes in sheer senility.

* *Vālmiki* : VII. 98.

दण्डकाष्ठमवष्टभ्य बाष्पन्याकुलितेक्षणः ।

अवाक्शिरा दीनमना यमो ह्यासीत्सुदुःखितः ।

स रुरोद चिरं कालं बहुशो बाष्पमुत्सृजन् ॥

left incompetent, like Napoleon's, to manage any situation independently.

Duty was his watchword throughout. When he saw the Aryan people sunk in slavery and satisfied with their lot—a dangerous mood indeed, he felt that his first duty was to liberate and lift them. And he devoted himself to that task so wholeheartedly that he did not even hesitate to leave his father alone on deathbed and his helpless mother under the shadow of widowhood. When he saw that Sītā had no other refuge but himself, no place of honour in the kingdom, after he was turned out of it a homeless wanderer, he took her along with him to the forest, though he knew full well that she would be an additional source of anxiety to him.* But the same Sītā he turned out of doors at a time when she was a great solace to him in his days of well-earned rest,† because the womenfolk of

* *Vālmiki* : II. 28.

अरण्यवासे वसतो भयानि विविधानि च ।
तदलं ते वनं गत्वा क्षेमं नहि वनं तव ।
विमृशन्निव पश्यामि बहुदोषकरं वनम् ॥

† *Bhavabhūti* : I.

इयं गेहे लक्ष्मीरियममृतवर्तिर्नयनयोर्
असावस्याः स्पर्शो वपुषि बहुलश्चन्दनरसः ।
अयं बाहुः कण्ठे शिशिरमसृणो मौक्तिकसरः
किमस्या न प्रेयो यदि पुनरसह्यो न विरहः ॥

Here Rama says after his return from Lañkā, 'Sītā is the apple of my eye, the light of my house. Everything about her is delightful except separation, which is intolerable to me even in thought.'

Ayodhyā misconstrued her example and justified their own intrigues with their paramours by reference to her.* When she left him for good, and all of a sudden, in the hour of his supreme joy at the changed attitude of his people, he felt so crushed in mind and body that he would have gladly followed her to heaven. But realising his duty towards his sons who had been left by her in his charge, he somehow held together his shattered heart and saw to their up-bringing. When they and the sons of his brothers were of age, trained and efficient, he appointed them rulers of the various parts of his empire, so that they might all grow familiar with the difficult art of government under the supervision of their parents and be enabled to fulfill afterwards all the duties of sovereignty with satisfaction. The countries assigned to their charge were as follows :—

‘The country of the Upper Indus, including Kashmir, Kabul, Kandahar, Baluchistan, and N. W. Provinces, was placed under the two sons of Bharata.† The country from the river Vidiśā or Dasan to the north of Mathurā, including

* *Vālmiki* : VII. 43.

अस्माकमपि दारेषु सहनीयं भविष्यति ।

यथा हि कुरुते राजा प्रजास्तमनुवर्तते ॥

i. e. We must now connive at the misconduct of our wives; for as subjects we have to follow in the footsteps of our king and queen.

† *Kālidāsa* : XV.

स तक्षपुष्कलौ पुत्रौ राजधान्योस्तदाख्ययोः ।

अभिषिच्याथ भरतो रामान्तिकमुपागमत् ॥

Mālavā, Sindh, Central India, and Rajputānā, was placed under the two sons of Śatrughna.* The country of the Southern and Northern Kōśala was placed under his two sons.† The remaining portion was placed under the two sons of Lakshmaṇa.‡ The country to the south of the Godāvārī was placed under Hanūmān, excluding Kishkindhā which was placed under Sugrīva, and Laṅkā which was under Vibhīṣhaṇa. §

When he saw that the empire was safe in the hands of his sons and nephews, when he saw that Lakshmaṇa had sought release from the strain of work and worry on the banks of the Sarayū, when he saw that Bharata and Śatrughna also looked forward to repose in heaven, then only did he think that he was free to shake off this mortal coil. With a clear conscience he took leave of the world and stood before his Maker with a bright face, saying without a quiver in his voice,

‘My Lord, here I am. Judge me as you please.’

* Kālidāsa : XV.

शत्रुघातिनि शत्रुघ्नः सुबाहौ च बहुश्रुते ।
मथुराविदिशे सून्वोर्निदधे पूर्वजोत्सुकः ॥

† Kālidāsa : XV.

स निवेद्य कुशावत्यां रिपुनागांकुशं कुशम् ।
शरावत्यां सतां सूक्तैर्जनिताश्रुलवं लवम् ॥

‡ Kālidāsa : XV.

अंगदं चन्द्रकेतुं च लक्ष्मणोऽप्यात्मसंभवौ ।
शासनान्द्रघुनाथस्य चक्रे कारापथेऽश्वरौ ॥

§ Kālidāsa : XV.

लंकानाथं पवनतनयं दक्षिणे चोत्तरे च ॥

APPENDIX

The name *Rāvaṇa* is rather intriguing. Although the Indian poets take it to be the name of a single individual, yet it is difficult to believe how the *Rāvaṇa* who had killed Anaranya, a remote ancestor of Rāma, could be the same *Rāvaṇa* whom Rāma himself, coming several generations after him, killed. To my mind, therefore, it seems that like *Caesar* for the emperors of Rome, like *Kaiser* for the emperors of Germany, and like *Mikādo* for the emperors of Japan, the word *Rāvaṇa* was a title of distinction for the mighty rulers of Laṅkā after the Non-Aryans had recovered from their debacle at Tripurī and established a firm footing in the island. This view gains support from the way Pāṇini derives the patronymic *Rāvaṇa* from the word *Viśravas*. He says that when the affix *an*, in the sense of a descendant thereof, is applied to *Viśravas*, the substitute *Ravana* somehow glides into its place to receive the said affix, so that the resultant patronymic from *Viśravas* is not *Vaiśravasa*, as one might expect, but curiously enough the word-form *Rāvaṇa* !*

* *Pāṇini* : IV. 1. 112.

विश्रवःशब्दादपत्यार्थे ऽणप्रत्यये ऋति

‘विश्रवसो विश्रवणरवणौ’ इति स्वणादेशः ।

Quoted by Mallinātha in his commentary on verse 91 of Canto XII, *Raghuvamśa*.

Mālavā, Sindh, Central India, and Rajputānā, was placed under the two sons of Śatrughna.* The country of the Southern and Northern Kōśala was placed under his two sons.† The remaining portion was placed under the two sons of Lakshmaṇa.‡ The country to the south of the Godāvārī was placed under Hanūmān, excluding Kishkindhā which was placed under Sugrīva, and Laṅkā which was under Vibhīṣhaṇa. §

When he saw that the empire was safe in the hands of his sons and nephews, when he saw that Lakshmaṇa had sought release from the strain of work and worry on the banks of the Sarayū, when he saw that Bharata and Śatrughna also looked forward to repose in heaven, then only did he think that he was free to shake off this mortal coil. With a clear conscience he took leave of the world and stood before his Maker with a bright face, saying without a quiver in his voice,

'My Lord, here I am. Judge me as you please.'

* *Kālidāsa* : XV.

शत्रुघातिनि शत्रुघ्नः सुबाहौ च बहुश्रुते ।
मथुराविदिशे सूनोर्निदधे पूर्वजोत्सुकः ॥

† *Kālidāsa* : XV.

स निवेश्य कुशावत्यां रिपुनागांकुशं कुशम् ।
शरावत्यां सतां सूक्तैर्जनिताश्रुलवं लवम् ॥

‡ *Kālidāsa* : XV.

अंगदं चन्द्रकेतुं च लक्ष्मणोऽप्यात्मसंभवौ ।
शासनाद्रघुनाथस्य चक्रे कारापथेश्वरौ ॥

§ *Kālidāsa* : XV.

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This etymological jugglery clearly indicates that when a descendant of Viśravas retrieved the lost glory of his race and founded a dynasty in Laṅkā, he styled himself *Rāvaṇa*,* obviously from pride at the noise he made in the world by his portentous rise to power. His successors assumed the title of *Rāvaṇa* along with the crown of Laṅkā, and fully justified their claim to both by carrying forward his policy of world domination by ruthless suppression and extermination of the Aryan invaders from the north. Thus as the policy of Laṅkā and the spirit of its rulers remained the same from beginning to end, to the Aryans it mattered little as to which particular king was on the throne of Laṅkā. Whosoever he may be, he was only a replica of *Rāvaṇa*, a source of dire anxiety and dreadful trouble to them as before. Individual kings might die in due course, but the name and spirit of *Rāvaṇa* lived for ever, only changing the outer vesture of body from time to time. Hence the Aryans looked upon the rulers of Laṅkā as one *Rāvaṇa* and attributed to him all their feats of prowess and their terms of life. Thus *Rāvaṇa* became an abnormal being in mythology, interminable in existence, ubiquitous in presence, irresistible in might, and monstrous in shape. It is this *Rāvaṇa*, or in other words the spirit of *Rāvaṇism*, 'in which sat the dread and fear' of Aryans, whom Rāma destroyed root and branch, and therein lay his greatness and his claim to eternal fame !

* The word literally means a noise-maker, from the Sanskrit root *ru* to roar.

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